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THE

NATIONAL LIBERAL FEDERATION

From its Commencement to
the General Election of 1906

From a Painting by Sir George Reid, P.R.S.A., 1914

Robt Spence Watson

THE NATIONAL LIBERAL FEDERATION

FROM ITS COMMENCEMENT TO THE GENERAL ELECTION OF 1906

By

ROBERT SPENCE WATSON, LL.D.

President of the Federation, 1890-1902

WITH AN INTRODUCTION

BY

THE RIGHT HON. AUGUSTINE BIRRELL,

K.C., M.P.

(*President of the Federation*, 1902-1906)

LONDON

T. FISHER UNWIN

ADELPHI TERRACE

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PREFATORY NOTE

WHEN first I became personally acquainted with the operations of the National Liberal Federation, the Author of this short history was at once its inspiration and its directing mind. Anyone less like the "boss" of an electoral Machine than Dr Spence Watson it would be impossible to imagine. Although a strong party man, his devotion to the Party was simply the measure of his conviction that no better instrument for the good service of the country and of the whole human race lay nearer to the hands of Englishmen at this period of our political development. Impatient though Dr Spence Watson may occasionally have been of plans and policies which, in his opinion, by distracting the attention and dividing the allegiance of individual electors, endangered the solidity and consequently the force of the Party Vote—nobody could be ten minutes in his company without making the discovery that the President of the National Liberal Federation was himself a man who not only would have scorned to owe allegiance to, but would have been the very first to head a revolt from, a Party which did not continue to embody those principles of civil and religious liberty all the world over which were, and happily still are, to him truths of perpetual and universal obligation.

As Dr Spence Watson has chosen to write a history of the National Liberal Federation, and to leave himself out of the picture, save so far as the vigorous brush of his friend, Sir George Reid, has supplied the

vacancy, I have felt bound, as his immediate successor in the Chair, and therefore the man perhaps best able to appreciate his commanding influence, to add these few words by way of preface.

As for the National Liberal Federation itself, it is important, I think, to bear in mind that it is always easy to exaggerate or to minimise the importance of political organisation in England. Foreigners, especially, are easily deceived in such matters, and some have been found attributing to our Federation a mysterious and sinister influence over politics, destructive alike of honest independent thought and conviction, and of the character of our public men, who are represented as tied to the wheel of this Car of Juggernaut.

The mere word "organisation" brings some craven souls to their knees and induces others to thunder invectives against the Party machine; and as nobody exactly knows what "organisation" means, it becomes all the harder to explain how the work of the National Liberal Federation is no less innocent than useful.

But Dr Spence Watson has, I think, accomplished this task in the following history of the body with which he has been closely connected from the very first. I will only add a very few words founded on my own experience in the Presidential Chair.

If it is useful, as it must be, to be able to ascertain in general terms the average opinion on any subject, or set of subjects, of the main body of declared and ardent supporters of a political party, this the Federation is able to do after a fashion as nearly conclusive as can well be. When differences of opinion exist, as they have existed again and again in the ranks of the Liberal Party during the existence of the Federation, those differences of opinion invariably make themselves felt at the meetings of the Federation. No delegate can go away ignorant of the existence of these differences, and, though there is not and never can be time fully to discuss them,

yet the proceedings afford a real indication of the general view of the active supporters of the Party throughout the country. What danger can there be in this? Are not men to be free to speak their minds out? Are all differences of opinion to be ignored? Are politicians to be silenced simply because they are not Members of Parliament? So far as the rank and file are concerned, I feel certain that the delegates who attend the meetings of the Federation are all the better politicians for the lessons they there learn.

It has sometimes been charged against the Federation that instead of being an independent mouthpiece of opinion for the rank and file, it takes its orders from the Party Leaders. At other times the charge has been that the Leaders of the Party are lacking in independence, and are too subservient to the dictates of the Federation. As a matter of fact, I conceive the plain truth to be that, when the opinion of the Federation by general admission expresses the view of the whole Party, the Leaders cannot ignore it if they would, and that in turn, when the view of the Leaders commends itself to the judgment of Liberals at large, the Federation is to be found actively and loyally supporting that view.

All this seems fit and proper in a country which we like to think is popularly governed, and as a fact both Parties in the State have long since adopted much the same methods for organising and educating their supporters.

In the twenty-eight years with which Dr Spence Watson deals, he has seen the Liberal Party sometimes in prosperity but more often in adversity. Yet in the darkest days he never despaired of the Republic. He went on steadily sowing the good seed, always well assured that the long winter would end, and the time of harvest again come round. It is with the great reaping of last January that Dr Spence Watson brings his history to a close.

What this Second Parliament of King Edward VII. will do to bring about those social and political re-

forms for which the Author of this volume has striven—this we have still to see. Happily it is not for me to make prediction; but this I will say, that the Liberal Party, in all times and at all seasons, will do well to bring to the struggle the same combination of sagacity and fearlessness as characterise the good Quaker and sturdy fighter to whose book these few words of mine must serve as introduction.

AUGUSTINE BIRRELL.

CHELSEA, *October* 1906.

Univ. of California

The National Liberal Federation

CHAPTER I

FORMATION OF FEDERATION AND EARLY WORK

Introductory—Early Liberal Associations—The Formation of the National Liberal Federation—The first work of the Federation—First Annual Meeting, Leeds, 1879—Independence of Local Organisations—Conferences at Gloucester and Leicester—Annual Meeting, Darlington, 1880—Conferences at Cardiff, Southampton, and Ipswich—Annual Meeting, Birmingham, 1881—Afghan War—Annexation of Transvaal Revoked—Compensation for Disturbance Bill rejected by Lords—Irish Land Bill. Action of Federation—Annual Meeting, Liverpool, 1881 — Obstruction — The Bradlaugh Question — County Franchise — John Bright and Birmingham — Annual Meeting at Bristol — Redistribution—The Soudan—Annual Meeting at Bradford, 1885.

INTRODUCTORY

THE National Liberal Federation was formed in 1877 and has therefore now been twenty-eight years in existence. I have found that many of those who attend its meetings have no distinct idea as to the objects with which it was begun, or, of the work which it has actually accomplished. From time to time persons have written about it as though it had attempted to be a manufactory of public opinion. They have suggested that it was systematically guilty of the somewhat vague crime of wirepulling;

it has been supposed that a small group of men, meeting in the Metropolis, send forth certain decrees to certain associated bodies throughout the country, which are enforced in some mysterious way; and that, thus, there results, throughout the land, a movement apparently spontaneous but really the work of a few individuals. In this way it is alleged that politics become, not the expression of the popular mind, but of the views of those who sit in secret conclave.

Having been somewhat closely connected with the Federation from the beginning, I propose to give a short history of it for the first twenty-eight years of its existence. I shall endeavour to put the facts fairly forward, and I think that the erroneousness of the views I have mentioned, all of which have been repeatedly brought before me, will clearly appear from my statement.

I have never been blind to the dangers which are common to all organized associations of men who live in different parts of the country but who have a common general object. The principal of these is perhaps the inclination, if the necessary centre proves itself efficient, for the constituent parts to rest upon it and to lose some of their individuality. Next to this, there is the risk of gradually developing a creed, or, in other words, laying down hard and fast lines of belief which men must conform to under pain of condemnation. I hope that I shall be able to show that, both in the Federation and in its constituent parts, these evils have been foreseen and avoided. I say the Federation and its constituent parts. The Federation is a union of all English and Welsh Liberal Associations, and these exist, or should exist, throughout England and Wales, in every electoral district, whether Borough or County.

Early Liberal Associations

The early Liberal Associations were practically

Committees appointed by a number of subscribers who were able to contribute to the expense of carrying them on. When Boroughs obtained Household suffrage the great majority of those added to the Borough constituencies were working men, and it was natural that they should require to have a voice in the selection of their representatives. Thus the then existing Liberal Association of Birmingham received a new constitution according to which every Liberal in the town became a member by virtue of his Liberalism and without any other qualification; whether he subscribed to the expenses of the Party or not he had a vote at meetings of the Association and was eligible to serve on its Committees. It was a case of universal suffrage and one man one vote, that of the poorest member counting the same as that of the richest.

I cannot tell when the early Liberal Associations were first formed. I myself heard of them at the end of 1873 from John Bright. Speaking of the Election at the end of that year in Newcastle when Mr Joseph Cowen was first returned to Parliament, he expressed some surprise that we had no Liberal Association, and he went on to explain to me how, with others, he had assisted in the formation of such a body in Rochdale, I think in the late thirties. He described in detail their mode of procedure and how, by it, they had divided Rochdale into canvassing districts, at the head of each of which there was a Captain over a Committee. Each member of the Committee undertook one or two streets in a special district, and made himself responsible for seeing that a return was obtained of every voter in such streets. Thus, whenever there was a Bye-election or a General Election declared, the whole town could be covered and canvassed within a very short space of time, if I remember rightly he stated forty-eight hours after any vacancy occurred. At his instigation I held meetings in the different Wards of Newcastle, the matter was actively taken up by our leading

Liberals and our Association was modelled upon John Bright's description of that at Rochdale. We had no knowledge of that which existed at Birmingham at the time we formed ours.

But we soon heard of it, and found that Birmingham had probably recognised, more clearly than most other places where Associations had been formed, the necessity for placing them upon an absolutely popular basis. They had thus made the Association in each electoral district of the Borough co-extensive with the Party, for they had no payment or other test as a requirement for membership, but they allowed all who chose to call themselves Liberals to attend and take part in the meetings of the Association, and such meetings were called by public placard and advertisement.

The Formation of the National Liberal Federation

But, if Liberal Associations did not take their rise in Birmingham, the National Liberal Federation did. Mr William Harris, whose "History of Radicalism" ought to be known to every Liberal, took the view that it would add greatly to the strength of the Liberal Party if all the Liberal Associations, which had been established on a popular basis, were federated "in order to facilitate the public discussion of questions, and to more effectually promote the adoption of Liberal principles in the government of the country." Mr Harris brought his plan before the Birmingham Liberal Association who cordially approved of it. They entered into communication with the other Associations which they knew of, and the result was that a circular was issued, on the 19th May 1877, inviting all existing Liberal Associations to appoint representatives to attend a Conference to be held in Birmingham on the 31st of that month. The circular was signed by the President, Vice-President, Treasurer, and Secretary, of the Birming-

ham Liberal Association and by the Presidents and Secretaries of the Leeds, Sheffield, and Newcastle-upon-Tyne, Liberal Associations. The circular also stated that a Public Meeting would be held on the evening of the 31st at Bingley Hall, and would be addressed by the Right Honourable W. E. Gladstone, M.P. Ninety-five Associations nominated delegates to attend the Conference, those of Aberdeen and Edinburgh being amongst the number.

The Conference was presided over by Mr Chamberlain, who was one of the Members for Birmingham. He addressed it at some length explaining the objects which those who called the meeting had in view. It was not proposed to impose any programme upon the Associations which might decide to federate, but it was expected that one of the results of the proceedings would be to give greater definitiveness to Liberal Policy, to establish clearer aims and more decisive action. "The present position of the Liberal Party," he said, "is not one which can be regarded with satisfaction by any of its members. How are we to revive its drooping fortunes? There are some of our advisers who tell us that we are to do nothing; that we should not agitate for anything upon which we are not absolutely unanimous, that we should pass a self-denying ordinance and each of us surrender the objects which we hold true; and, in fact, we should unite the Liberal Party by sacrificing every Liberal principle." It is somewhat interesting to see that twenty-eight years ago there were some of those timid reactionary advisers in our Party who, even to-day, are a constant menace to the success of all advanced ideas. Mr Chamberlain alluded to the presence at the public meeting to be held that night of "the statesman whose hold upon the confidence of his fellow-countrymen is due to his keen appreciation of the popular temper; to his hearty sympathy with the popular aspirations, and, who, on more than one occasion, and conspicuously during the last few months, has stood almost alone to advocate a bold

a decided, and an intelligible policy in opposition to the timid counsels which naturally spring from want of earnest conviction."

Mr William Harris in moving "That, in order to assist the organization of the Liberal Party, and to promote the adoption of Liberal principles in the government of the country, it is desirable to form a Federation of Liberal Associations established on a popular basis," explained that what he wanted the meeting to see was the necessity of establishing a general political organization instead of arousing special political agitations for every political subject.

The matter was then fully discussed. Several gentlemen spoke of the necessity of preventing any interference with the independence of the local Liberal Associations, and, after careful consideration, the resolution was unanimously agreed to.

Mr J. S. Wright, the President of the Birmingham Liberal Association, moved five resolutions; the first of these declared the objects of the Federation to be to assist in the organization throughout the country of Liberal Associations based on popular representation, and to promote the adoption of Liberal principles in the government of the country. The second provided for the appointment of the necessary officers, and Mr Wright explained how desirable it was, that a large sum of money should be annually collected for the expenses of carrying on the work of the contemplated body. The next resolution was the appointment of a Council which was to be composed of delegated representatives of all the Federated Associations. The number to be appointed by each body was to be determined by the population of the town or district to be represented. The Council was to meet at least once a year, the first meeting in the year being the Annual Meeting. The next resolution provided for the formation of a smaller body to be called the General Committee, which was to consist of the officers of the Association and representatives of each Federated Association to be appointed from

time to time as meetings might be called. It had three special functions, First, to aid in the formation of new Liberal Associations based on popular representation, and generally to promote the objects of the Federation; Second, to summon the Annual Meeting of the Council, or any other General Meeting of the Council, which it might deem proper; and Third, to submit to the Federated Associations political questions and measures upon which united action might be considered desirable. The meetings of the General Committee were to be held at Birmingham until otherwise decided, and the officers were to call a meeting at the request of any three of the Federated Associations. The Committee might co-opt twenty-five persons. Its power was simply initiative; it could not say what action should or should not be taken for that would rest with the general body of representatives and the Federated Associations. It was to reflect the country, and, to do that, the minds of a large number of the constituencies throughout the length and breadth of the land must be known. It was explained that the future Constitution of the Association was not to be pledged; there was to be no dictation, the independence of the Associations throughout the country was to be maintained intact.

After this resolution was carried the meeting proceeded to the election of officers. Mr Chamberlain was elected President of the Federation, the Presidents of the Birmingham, Manchester, Liverpool, Leeds, Sheffield, Newcastle-upon-Tyne, Sunderland, Bradford, Northampton, Leicester, Portsmouth, and Wolverhampton Liberal Associations were requested to accept office as Vice-Presidents, and Mr Jesse Collings was elected Honorary Secretary and Mr J. S. Wright Treasurer of the Federation.

The Conference partook much more of the real character of such a gathering than most Conferences do. It was abundantly evident that even its most ardent promoters had not come to any very clear

conclusion as to what the real objects of the Federation were to be. Perhaps this was done advisedly and it certainly was wise. The discussions lost the stigma of being cut and dried. The Chairman explained how the new Federation might aid in converting the old-fashioned Liberal Associations into representative popular ones, and he said that it might weld them together, "into a central organization, itself representative, in its turn, of those popular Associations, and forming, what he might call a National Convention, to promote Liberal objects. We hope that the time is not far distant when we may see the meeting of what may be a real Liberal Parliament outside the Imperial Legislature, and, unlike it, elected by universal suffrage and with some regard to a fair distribution of political power." He (wisely, perhaps prophetically) did not add that this Parliament would be without an Opposition. I have already stated that he explained that no Programme would be imposed upon the new Association, and indeed neither then nor at any other time has a Programme been prepared. I shall have more to say upon this matter at a later period. It is not without interest to find that he devoted a considerable portion of his remarks to the want of leadership in the Liberal Party. "During the last three or four years of inaction, whilst our official leaders have been waiting or have been divided amongst themselves, we find that public opinion has been solidifying and crystallizing, until I verily believe that soon the only people who will not know where we are going are those who have undertaken to guide our advance." He announced that he would be bound to accept the decision of the organization, whatever it might be, upon religious equality and upon every great political question, and again he said that the Association was founded upon the belief that "the Liberals in the country are more united than their Leaders."

The Conference adopted the proposed Constitution on the understanding that it was to be tried for one

year as an experiment. If after twelve months they found anything to alter they could then make the change.

In its main lines the Constitution then formed is the constitution of the Federation of to-day. There have from time to time been modifications made but the objects of the Federation remain as they were originally determined. The Council meeting is an annual occurrence, and the General Committee meets once a year at least, and whenever any special political object demands the attention of the representatives of all the Federated Associations, and united action upon their part.

In the afternoon of the day upon which the Conference was held Mr Gladstone had a public entry into Birmingham which was more like that of some great Monarch returning to his people after a mighty victory than that of one who had for the moment, and nominally, no position even as the Leader of an Opposition which was itself declared to be weak and discredited. It was an extraordinary sight. Those who occupied a point of vantage so far as view was concerned, looked upon a mighty mass of men and women closely packed and enthusiastic almost beyond belief. As the open carriage proceeded slowly along the streets, there was something affecting not merely in the volume of sound produced by the cheering but in the character of that sound. There was the sense that, in the pale and, even then, venerable figure of him who was greeted thus, the people had indeed a Leader whom they could follow, one to whom they looked for great measures having the welfare of their beloved country as their supreme object, and you felt that Mr and Mrs Gladstone were the objects not merely of respect and reverence but of real affection. I remember that I was standing upon a wagon amongst a number of men in their working clothes, and how intense their feeling was, and how the strange beauty and pathos of the scene impressed them, and their emotion, in

spite of great restraint, gave visible evidence of its reality.

The great Meeting in Bingley Hall still stands out to those who were privileged to be present as first amongst the meetings which they have ever attended. There were more than 30,000 people present, and it would be impossible to express in words the feelings by which the whole multitude appeared to be inspired. I shall not dwell upon the marvellous speech with which for more than two hours Mr Gladstone held his great audience spell-bound. Even his beautiful and penetrating voice failed at times to reach the entire audience, but the quiet and decorum throughout were quite remarkable when it is borne in mind that the great majority of the listeners were standing and had been standing for a long time before the meeting began. At the commencement Mr Gladstone referred felicitously to the events of the day. "Ladies and Gentlemen, undoubtedly in the point of organization we have a lesson to learn from our opponents. They have for years been ahead of us in this respect and, rely upon it, they will continue ahead of us so long as we adhere only to the methods which they pursue, so long as we adhere to the method of arbitrary selection of the representatives of party founded mainly upon the power of the purse. It is, in my opinion, to the honour of Birmingham that she has held up the banner of a wider and a holier principle and, as the law of popular selection is the foundation of the British House of Commons, so, if I understand you aright, it is the principle and practice of your great town that local organizations shall be governed by the same principle, and that free popular choice shall be its basis and its rule. I rejoice, Sir, not merely that you are about to inculcate this lesson, but that the large audience here to-day of many hundreds of representatives of the Constituencies of the country, met together to consider this subject and to join in council with you, testifies to the disposition which exists to adopt this admirable principle of

which you have given the example and of which if it be freely and largely adopted I, for one, should be sufficiently sanguine to predict, with confidence, a success." I must not dwell further upon this meeting but I may mention two points which remain in my memory as being in their different ways noteworthy. In the course of his speech Mr Gladstone alluded to two Members who had left the House upon some critical debate without voting. The platform was crowded, and I was placed immediately behind Mrs Gladstone and Mr Chamberlain and almost between them. Mr Chamberlain asked Mrs Gladstone who the Members were and she said Mr Puleston and Mr Hubbard. Leaning slightly back, Mr Gladstone, who had been on his feet certainly for more than half an hour with this mighty audience before him, said, in an undertone, "Not Hubbard, so and so," telling the correct name, which I have forgotten. This extraordinary power of carrying on two things at once, making a speech which would have exhausted the whole mental energies of any other man, and, at the same time, the inability to allow an unimportant error to go uncorrected and having the power to correct it under such circumstances, remains with me as the most remarkable phenomenon I have ever known upon a public platform.

The second was when, in the course of his observations, Mr Gladstone referred to what had been stated as to the worthlessness of the Danubian Principalities and the little that they had ever done for Europe. Then, in one or two sentences of remarkable beauty, he compared them to the sand of the sea-shore which, whilst growing nothing itself, keeps back the ocean from overspreading the fertile land. Here not a word was missed by the mighty gathering. He drew himself up, his hand quivering above his head and his voice thrilling through the great Hall, and, when his words were ended, and he paused for breath, there was dead silence which was followed by such a burst of cheering as one thought might almost have

removed the very roof. Far away at the other end of the building a gallery had been erected in which a number of ladies had found seats. That every word had reached this remote point was seen immediately by a white cloud which floated in the distance, and which you gradually saw was formed by the handkerchiefs of the ladies as they waved their applause.

THE FIRST WORK OF THE FEDERATION

The new Federation, thus propitiously started, got at once under way. The first meeting of the General Committee was held on the 2nd July 1877 at Birmingham, and Mr William Harris was elected Chairman of the Committee and Mr Schnadhorst the Secretary to the Federation, an office the duties of which he continued to discharge with remarkable efficiency for sixteen years. Three sub-committees were appointed for administrative work, one to attend to publishing, one for organization, and one for finance. Mr Schnadhorst at once devoted himself to the work of Liberal organization in various parts of the country with the result that when the first Annual Meeting of the Council was held in Leeds on the 22nd January 1879, the Federation consisted of one hundred and one Associations. When it was originally constituted in May 1877 it consisted of forty-six Liberal Associations in union. Mr Schnadhorst was still in active correspondence with a large number of centres and many more associations on the representative basis were in course of being formed. The officers of the Federation were already in actual correspondence with more than 300 Liberal organizations throughout the country.

So far as publications were concerned five pamphlets had been issued, four of which treated on organization, and one was entitled "England and Afghanistan. Is the War Just?" Circulars on questions of political and legislative interest had also been issued from time to time.

At this time there was a great danger that our country should be involved in a war on behalf of Turkey against Russia, and the Committee of the Federation took a very active part in arousing public opinion throughout the country against such a criminal proceeding. In answer to their circular urging meetings in favour of strict neutrality there were held thirteen meetings of Chambers of Commerce, twenty-three of Town Councils, twenty-eight Town's meetings, and sixty-three public meetings, making a total of one hundred and twenty-seven, and these were exclusive of large numbers of meetings held and resolutions passed by the Executive Committees of Liberal organizations, and Societies and Committees of various kinds. They also organized, in conjunction with the National Reform Union, a deputation to the Leaders of the Liberals in Parliament, Lord Hartington and Lord Granville, and Mr Bright, in introducing it, described it as "a remarkable deputation, such a one as I have not seen before during my political experience." Mr Gladstone had greatly assisted the efforts of the Federation in this matter, and they resulted in a great and important measure of success to which, the Committee stated, his continuous and self-sacrificing labours most powerfully contributed. They further stated in the first Annual Report, which was presented to the meeting at Leeds, that, "but for Liberal action largely stimulated and guided by the Federated Liberal Associations, we should unquestionably have been at war with Russia, and, the present distress of the country, and the heavy taxation under which it labours, would then have been augmented in an incalculable degree."

First Annual Meeting, Leeds, 1879

The General Committee also met on 11th December 1877, and 13th May, 13th June, and 5th November, 1878. Leeds invited the Federation to hold its

first Annual Meeting in that town on 22nd January, 1879. In the morning a report of the Election of officers was presented, and a resolution was passed "that this meeting records with satisfaction the rapid spread of Liberal organizations throughout the country, founded on those principles of full popular representation and freedom of election recommended by this Federation, believing that they afford the best means for promoting political education and securing the effective union of all sections of Liberals."

In the evening a Public Meeting was held in the Town Hall over which Mr John Barran, M.P., presided. Mr Chamberlain moved "That this meeting enters its solemn protest against the foreign policy of the present Government in Eastern Europe. It has disregarded the true interests and alienated the sympathies of the peoples, whilst, by the recent Anglo-Turkish Convention, it has committed this country to indefinite and dangerous responsibility in Asia, as by overbearing diplomacy, and then by an unnecessary war, it has forced a neutral Prince into the arms of Russia and provoked the enmity of his people, and both in Europe and Asia it has weakened our defensive position and has sown the seeds of future war."

It is interesting to note in Mr Chamberlain's speech that he felt greatly the way in which the Tories prevented public meetings called to denounce the war for the defence of the Turkish dominion and stopped all peaceable demonstrations on the subject, so that the Government ventured to take extreme steps which brought us almost to the verge of war. He says, "Some of the speeches and articles which have appeared lately would cut almost at the root of the liberty of public meeting. I saw the other day in the *Standard*, which is usually a fair and moderate exponent of Conservative opinion, a statement to the effect, that no public meeting ought to be allowed until it was secured from any considerable opposition. I repudiate this doctrine with scorn and contempt as

a doctrine which would place the right of public meeting at the mercy of a few evil-intentioned persons in each district. The right of public meeting is as valuable a liberty in this country as the right of a free press itself." He warned the meeting against the special danger of the Federation. "We have to take care that we do not as the result of our operations substitute one clique for another. The foundation of this Association is its truly representative character. It is a condition of success that every section of the Party should be represented, that none should suffer from seclusion. At the present moment I hope that we shall be prepared to practise as a Federation that spirit of tolerance and of mutual concession which we recommend to all our individual members. The great need of the Liberal Party at this moment is union. Our first object is to make a unanimous protest against the way in which this country has recently been governed. We believe, I suppose, all of us, that the honour and interests of the country have been recklessly imperilled by the dangerous Foreign policy which Lord Beaconsfield's Ministry has recently usurped. We are marched from one surprise to another; we know not what a day may bring forth and, under these circumstances, our first duty ought to be, and our first object will be, to remove this constant source of apprehension and danger."

Surely, with very slight modification, these words might have been spoken at the end of the Sixth Session of the Parliament of 1900.

But a quarter of a century has passed. We have had an unjust war, not a threatening of it. He who then upheld the right of public meeting was a member of the Tory Government which fomented the unjust war, and countenanced the shameful violence of the organised bands of rowdies who prevented public meetings upon it, and stopped all peaceable demonstrations on the subject. The doctrines of the *Standard* newspaper which had been rejected twenty-

five years before were adopted by the political pervert. Politics, like poverty, make a man whose principles are not fixed acquainted with strange bedfellows.

Independence of Local Organizations

I think it important that I should emphasize the fact that at this meeting, as at those held at the formation of the Federation, it was made abundantly clear that the independence of local organisations would not be interfered with, and this has always been carefully borne in mind. There has never been any attempt to direct local work from the Central office, whilst there has always been the greatest readiness to send all such assistance asked for as was within the means of the Federation. The doctrine upon which it was founded, and which it has always held, is that it only really exists in its component parts. All power comes from them, and it is of vital importance that they should be living, active and earnest, and also that they should be strong and independent, only making use of the Central Office for information and aid in times of serious difficulty. Fault has occasionally been found with the Executive Committee because they have never endeavoured to exercise anything approaching to autocratic power, but the idea that the Federated Associations should lean upon the centre for support, or be under its control and command, is contrary to the root idea of the Federation and abhorrent to the very principles of Liberalism. Thus we should really become the American Caucus; thus we should get the "Boss" reprimanding and replacing local leaders and agents; thus would our politics become machine made, and we might win as many political victories as now, but all that makes politics of true worth would be at an end; the savour would have gone out of political life.

This matter is clearly put forward in the second

annual report which was laid before the Annual meeting of the Council held at Darlington on 3rd February 1880 which mentions the numerous applications for advice and assistance as to the organization of Liberal Associations which had been received and complied with. "The Secretary, Mr Schnadhorst, has been able to render valuable help in the way of counsel and information, thus fulfilling the intention of the Federation, it being a settled principle to avoid all interference with local action in the formation of all Liberal organizations, while at the same time willingly extending to all who require it the advantages the Federation offers as an advising body." The report states that the older methods of private and irresponsible party management had practically come to an end, and had been most usefully replaced by a system which places the control of the Liberal Party in the hands of the Party itself. Those of us who remember those older methods, and who perhaps took some part in the private and irresponsible party management, have always been the most anxious that the new system should never be allowed to become only a bigger and revised version of the old and unrepresentative method.

Conferences at Gloucester and Leicester

With the view of aiding the spread of organization to County districts, especially those which were influenced by the overflow of Urban population, two conferences were organized in the course of the year 1879 and successfully conducted by the Committee of the Federation. The first was held at Gloucester on the 4th June, and was attended by delegates from Liberal Associations in eleven Midland counties. A number of Members of Parliament were present, and a public meeting was held, which was addressed by Mr Chamberlain. Another conference was held at Leicester on the 11th November and proved of much importance, the union of town and country,

and the attendance of members of all sections of the Liberal Party being especially satisfactory. Mr Chamberlain also addressed a public meeting at Leicester in connection with this conference.

During the year several Federation pamphlets had been issued, or were in course of being published. The first was on "The Relations of Landlord and Tenant," by Mr James Howard, and it had a very large circulation amongst farmers throughout the country, a special fund being raised in East Worcestershire to distribute it gratuitously to every farmer in that division. Mr Shaw Lefevre, M.P., prepared a pamphlet on "The Freedom of the Land," Mr Grant Duff one on "Foreign Policy," Sir Charles Dilke, M.P., one on "Parliamentary Reform," Mr Chamberlain, M.P., one on "Free Schools," whilst Mr John Morley had been requested to prepare one on "The Church Question." Many other pamphlets had been distributed by the Federation Committee.

Annual Council Meeting, Darlington, 1880

The public meeting in the evening was held in the Town Hall of Darlington with Councillor Swinburne, the Mayor, in the Chair, and Mr Chamberlain seconded the first resolution, which was moved by Mr Henry Fell Pease, "That in the opinion of this meeting the Foreign and Colonial Policy of Lord Beaconsfield's Government has been founded on false conceptions of the basis on which England's true greatness and real interests rest, and has been prosecuted in disregard of national morality, and, so far from having been justified by success, has proved a lamentable failure, whether measured by material results or international prestige."

Mr Chamberlain did not devote any time in his speech to the resolution. It was entirely a defence of the Federation from attacks which had been made on it, and it contained advice which, coming from so experienced an organizer, is well worthy of

constant consideration. It also sets forth what has been the intention of the Federation from its earliest days. Mr Chamberlain felt it less necessary to defend the organization than to warn his hearers "in view of the considerable success already attending our efforts not to expect too much from any political machinery. No organization can make up for the zeal, enthusiasm and self-sacrifice of individuals. The utmost we hope is to secure everywhere a full representation of the Liberal Party. If there be anywhere any Liberal Association which is not at the present time truly representative of every class and section of the Liberal Party, then I say it is the duty of all who are interested in its success to endeavour by all means to invite, to entreat, nay almost to compel outsiders to come in." He points out that where an Association is really representative its decision should be observed and respected by every man who puts the success of his Party and principles above personal claims and selfish ambition. "When you come to the choice of a candidate or the choice of a policy there must occasionally be differences of opinion. If nobody will give way everybody must suffer, and, in a time like the present, at a time of great national crisis, anything which promotes division and prevents union is something more than a mistake, it is a political crime." It is interesting to see that Mr Chamberlain expressed another truth very clearly and forcibly, one which we always require to bear in mind. "Even now I want to assure our moderate friends that, though they are out of sight, they are never out of mind. We feel we want the aid of every man who is opposed to the policy of the present Government, a policy which is a policy of violence and wrong abroad and of feebleness and incapacity at home." And again, "All that is required is that, whilst you maintain your several opinions and claim full opportunity to discuss them, and, if possible, to convert a majority to them, you will not make their im-

mediate realisation an indispensable point in your programme, and that you will not make test questions of matters which, however important they may appear to yourselves, may nevertheless be fairly postponed for a time while other and equally great reforms are being satisfactorily dealt with. I do not think it is altogether in the interests of Radicals to force the pace unduly. Every inch we gain is an inch nearer the goal, and if we can persuade the moderate section of Liberals to accompany us on the next stage of our journey, perhaps at its termination they may find that we are not such terrible fellows as we have been represented to be, and may be induced to go a stage further in the same direction. The real danger to the Party is not in the moderate Liberals. It is true the moderate Liberals do not travel so quickly as we should like; they are not willing as yet to go so far as we desire; but at least they do not go backwards, and they turn neither to the right nor to the left. I am much more inclined to fear the action of those who call themselves our friends, and who claim to be Radicals, because they accept the results of the popular agitations of the time, whilst they heartily distrust the democratic influences by which these results have been obtained. With these gentlemen popular government would be in much greater favour if somehow the people could be left out."

The Report presented to this Annual Meeting pointed out that the approach of a General Election rendered organization and federation of special importance in order that the Liberal majority of the country might be enabled so to use its vast reserve of strength as to resume its former preponderance in the legislative council of the nation. The Committee looked forward with confidence to such an appeal, for they believed that the Liberal cause would have a great victory to which the labours of the Federation would materially conduce. This was the case. The country had by bitter experience learned the inward

meaning of a "spirited foreign policy," and, at the General Election of 1880, gave Mr Gladstone an astonishing majority.

In the Election of 1874, the Tories obtained fifty more votes than the Liberals, even counting every Home Ruler as a Liberal, which certainly was not the case. Now that majority was wiped out and the Liberals could reckon upon one hundred and twenty more votes than the Tories. Mr Gladstone was once more Premier, and Mr Chamberlain, having become President of the Board of Trade, resigned the Presidency of the Federation. At a meeting of the General Committee on the 15th June, the resignation was received, and Mr Jesse Collings, M.P., was requested to serve for the remainder of the year in the office of President, Mr Powell Williams being elected Honorary Secretary in his place. At the same meeting, Mr Charles Cochrane of Dudley was requested to serve as Treasurer for the remainder of the year, as the post had become vacant by the sudden and lamented death of Mr J. S. Wright, who had just been elected one of the Members for Nottingham. His loss was a severe one, not merely to Birmingham but to the Liberal cause throughout the kingdom, and the Committee, in tendering to his family the assurance of its sincere sympathy, spoke with gratitude of his arduous exertions in favour of wise and progressive legislation.

CONFERENCES AT CARDIFF, SOUTHAMPTON, AND IPSWICH

Three Conferences were held during the year 1880, at Cardiff for South Wales on 28th October, at Southampton for the Southern Counties of England on 30th November, and at Ipswich for the Eastern Counties on 16th December. Each of these was held in connection with the Local Liberal Associations by whom the necessary local arrangements were made, and each was attended by Members of Parliament,

official Liberals of all classes in the respective districts, and by numerous representatives of the Liberal organizations.

At the Cardiff conference Mr Schnadhorst read a paper on "County Organization," and a resolution was passed upon the subject. The first resolution of the meeting was as to the reform of the Land Laws of Great Britain and Ireland, demanding the removal of the restrictions imposed by primogeniture and entail, the adjustment of the relations between Landlord and Tenant, and the greater facility for the sale and transfer of land, opportunity being afforded for the gradual acquirement by the agricultural population of some portion of the soil they cultivate.

Similar resolutions were also passed at the public meeting held after the Conference.

A quarter of a century has passed since these resolutions were carried, and little progress has been made in the desired direction. Surely the time for wide and deep Radical reform has fully come.

At Southampton Dr R. W. Dale attended, and his support was of great value, as was the case whenever and wherever he appeared. Mr Powell Williams read a paper on "The Ballot Act and Corrupt Practices at Elections," and the Federation reprinted both his paper and that read by Mr Schnadhorst on "County Organization" at Cardiff.

Resolutions were passed at Southampton for the permanent establishment of the Ballot Act and for further measures against Corrupt Practices at Elections. But there was also an important resolution referring to the disturbed state of many parts of Ireland, and the necessity of any measures necessary to secure order being accompanied by definite assurance of legislation of a remedial character, and assuring the Government of the hearty support of the Liberal Party in proposing measures to deal fully and fairly with the ownership and occupation of land in Ireland, and in pressing them upon both Houses of

Parliament with the full authority of the responsible Ministers of the Crown.

At the public meeting in the evening a resolution of confidence in Her Majesty's Government was carried, the meeting recognizing the beneficent character of the legislation of the last Session of Parliament, and asking for a complete reform of the Land Laws which should remove the cause of distress in Ireland.

At Ipswich the resolutions carried were for the reform of the Land Laws, the wording being similar to that of the Cardiff resolution on the subject, and for the local Government of Counties and Rural Districts being based upon representative principles, so that the people in such districts, as well as those in towns, might have constitutional control over the expenditure of the funds to which they contribute, and over the laws and regulations to which they are subject.

Amongst the publications issued during the year (1880) the Committee mentioned in their report a statement of the general objects and immediate work of the National Federation, and they pressed home the extension of the organization of Liberals in all districts on a representative basis as "the only method by which united action can be secured and turned to effective use." They quote the following paragraphs of the statement referred to. "The Federation is a union of Liberal Associations established on a popular representative basis. No interference with the local independence of the Federated Associations is involved. Each Association arranges the details of its own organization and administers its own affairs. But from time to time, and on all occasions of emergency, representatives of all the Associations in union are convened to consider the course of action which may be recommended to their respective constituents. No formal political programme is submitted for general

acceptance but the opinions of Liberals on current measures are, as occasion may require, promptly and authoritatively ascertained. Thus the whole strength and resources of the Party may be concentrated upon the promotion of such legislation as is by general consent deemed of the first importance. The essential principle of the Federation is the participation of all the members of the Party in the formation and direction of its policy, and in the selection of those measures of reform and progress to which priority shall be given. This object can only be secured by the organisation of the Party upon a representative basis, that is by popularly elected local Associations, and by the union of such Associations in a general Federation."

Annual Meeting, Birmingham, 1881.

A full copy of the statement mentioned and of the Constitution of the Federation were appended to the report which was presented to the Annual Council meeting which was held in Birmingham on the 26th and 27th January 1881. I must quote from those papers certain words which further set out clearly what the views of those interested in the management of the Federation were as modified by the experience of three years' working. "Its objects are to assist in the organization throughout the country of Liberal Associations based on popular representation, and to disseminate political knowledge by means of the Press, pamphlets, lectures, and addresses, and generally to promote the adoption of Liberal principles in the Government of the country."

At Birmingham as already mentioned the Annual Council meeting occupied two days. The Mayor gave a Conversazione to the Delegates in the Council House on the evening of the first day, and a public meeting was held on the evening of the second day. At this public meeting the Mayor (Alderman Richard Chamberlain) presided, and the resolution,

which was moved by Mr Jesse Collings, M.P., seconded by Mr John Morley, and supported by Mr R. W. Dale, sets out the work done at the Conference in as much detail as is necessary to give here. It says, "That this meeting approves the resolutions of the Conference of the National Liberal Federation in condemning the obstruction now being offered in Parliament to pressing legislation, in regretting the necessity of restrictive proposals for the administration of Ireland, in assuring the Government of the support of the Liberal Party on behalf of remedial measures, and in urging that such measures shall be introduced with the least possible delay. That this meeting concurs with the Conference in impressing upon the Government the importance of dealing at the earliest possible moment with reforms in regard to the Land Laws, the extension of the franchise, the redistribution of seats, the establishment of representative County Government, and the prevention of corrupt practices at elections; and this meeting urges the extension of representative Liberal Organisations especially in the County constituencies for the purpose of bringing the whole force of the Liberal Party to bear upon the promotion of these and other necessary reforms."

In 1880, the year with which the report presented at Birmingham dealt, it was made evident that since the General Election, Mr Gladstone and his Government had done what they could to fulfil the pledges made at the time of the General Election, both as to foreign and domestic policy.

Afghan War

In Afghanistan the Tory Government determined, in 1875, that the Viceroy of India, Lord Northbrook, should be required to induce the Ameer to receive a temporary embassy in his capital. Lord Salisbury said in his despatch to Lord Northbrook: "It need not be publicly connected with the establishment of a

permanent mission within his dominions. There would be many advantages in ostensibly directing it to some object of small political interest which it will not be difficult for your Excellency to find or, if need be, to create." On this Lord Northbrook resigned and, in 1876, Lord Lytton was appointed, and he sent, as a special Envoy to the Ameer, Sir Lewis Pelly, perhaps the most objectionable Envoy he could have found. The Ameer, objecting to the Mission, was warned that the responsibility of refusing to receive the Envoy would rest entirely upon his Government. Lord Lytton intimated to him that he was an earthen pipkin between two iron pots, and that, if he did not desire to come to a speedy understanding with us, Russia did and desired it at his expense. We collected an army on the frontier of Afghanistan, threw a bridge over the Indus, and, at a Conference which was held at Peshawur, Sir Lewis Pelly threatened the Ameer that, if he did not accept certain offers which we made to him, we should continue to strengthen the frontiers of British India without further reference to him, in order to provide against future contingencies. We withdrew our native agent from Cabul and so, in a perfectly unjustifiable way, we blundered into the invasion of Afghanistan. The result was that we were filled with our own devices—we appeared to get our own way. In 1878 we entered and held Kandahar and Cabul; everything seemed to point to complete success when the Afghans suddenly rose and, in 1879, Sir Louis Cavagnari, our Envoy to Afghanistan, and his staff were murdered, and we had to beat a retreat. A punitive expedition was sent into Afghanistan under Lord Roberts (then Sir Frederick Roberts) whose policy of destroying every place he came to was so terribly severe that there were great indignation meetings in different parts of the country, and many leading men, including amongst them Mr Joseph Chamberlain, signed a remonstrance to the Government. One of the first acts of Mr Gladstone's Government was to put an end to this expedition

and to arrange terms of peace with the Ameer, and to give up to him at once the territory which we had taken.

Annexation of Transvaal Revoked

The Transvaal had, in 1877, been annexed by the Tory Government who had probably really been deceived by their agents as to the state of feeling in that country. The number of English settlers in it then was exceedingly small. They were for the most part in favour of annexation, but the Dutch inhabitants, who outnumbered them in something like the proportion of eight to one, were unanimously against it. This fact was concealed, the Transvaal was annexed, the people endeavoured to obtain a revocation of the annexation, and ultimately rose in arms against it. In this country certainly the great majority of the Liberal Party, as well as a multitude of persons who were not actively interested in politics, condemned the annexation and desired its revocation. It is not for me here to go into the history of the extraordinary difficulties which were involved in taking the only true course in this matter. Suffice it to say that, having once made up its mind that the right was to be done at all cost, Mr Gladstone's Government, in spite of the trumpery difficulty of Majuba Hill, bravely and wisely atoned for the great wrong which had been done by the Conservative Government, and restored to the Transvaal the liberty of which it had been improperly deprived. If the late Conservative Government had had a tithe of the wisdom of the Government of 1880 there would have been no Transvaal war; our country would have been saved great disgrace; and the many abiding evils which have sprung from that war, and the consequent destruction of two governments of white people, would have been spared to us.

Compensation for Disturbance Bill Rejected by Lords

But it soon became evident that among the Members who had secured Liberal seats, there were a number whose Liberalism was scarcely skin deep. They refused to support the policy of the Government in Ireland in passing a Bill for compensating the evicted tenant on certain conditions, if the landlord turned him out of his holding. Lord Lansdowne retired from the Government; the measure was not stoutly supported by the Irish themselves, Mr Parnell abstaining from supporting it in the Committee stage; sixteen Liberal members voted against the Third Reading, and the effect of their defection gave the House of Lords a plausible excuse for rejecting the Compensation for Disturbance Bill, and they share with the Lords a large measure of the responsibility for the outrages committed in Ireland during the autumn of 1880. If the Bill had been passed there is every reason to believe that most of those outrages would have been prevented.

Irish Land Bill. Action of Federation

In 1881 this disloyalty reappeared when the Irish Land Bill was before the House, and it became evident that that measure was in some jeopardy from the action of Liberal Members who proposed hostile amendments, abstained from voting, or otherwise harassed the government. Men of this kind we have always with us; pedants who find it hard to agree with anyone, or men who call themselves Liberal but without a cause.

The Executive Committee of the Federation found it necessary, in June 1881, to issue a circular to the Federated Associations calling their attention to the existence of this disloyalty, and asking them to take such action as might appear to them desirable, at the earliest possible moment, as such proceedings

involved danger to the nation as well as to the Liberal Government, and could not be tolerated.

This circular had its desired effect although the Members who were dealt with not unnaturally complained. Then the House of Lords resisted the passing of the Bill and, "guided by the unwise and heated policy of Lord Salisbury," took in the early part of August a course which, if persisted in, must have compelled Ministers to withdraw the Bill.

On Saturday, the 13th August, the Federation officers learned that matters were critical, and they convened by telegram a meeting to be held in the Westminster Palace Hotel at 3 p.m. on Monday, 15th August. Delegates assembled from all parts of the country. More than one hundred Associations were represented in person, and many others by letter or telegram. Strong resolutions were passed amidst much enthusiasm. These were directly communicated to Mr Gladstone. "The meeting produced a great impression throughout the country, rendered essential support to the Government by showing the House of Lords the resistance which it would create by throwing out or seriously endangering the Land Bill, and the Federation unquestionably contributed powerful assistance towards passing a measure which it is believed is destined ultimately to secure the peace and prosperity of Ireland, and which will stand as an enduring monument of wise Ministerial policy and of just legislation."

The Federation issued circulars during the year 1881 to the associated bodies with reference to the Transvaal and to Afghanistan. Mr Chamberlain took an especial part in showing the wisdom and justice of the Government proceedings in those cases. On the 30th March 1883, when he addressed a meeting of the members and friends of the Birmingham Junior Liberal Association, he alluded to South Africa and stated that what he wished to point out was that the whole of the trouble in South Africa came distinctly from the policy of meddlesome

intervention which we owed to the late Government. He said that Lord Salisbury had been consistent. "He was in favour of the annexation of the Transvaal; he was in favour of the occupation of the country by force even if it became apparent that the annexation itself had been made on false information. If the Orange Free State, as most probably would have been the case, had joined with the Transvaal Boers, no doubt Lord Salisbury would have declared war on them too, and if then, what was not at all unlikely, the whole of the Dutch population at the Cape had risen, Lord Salisbury with a light heart would have led this country into a war more serious in its consequences, more certain to be fruitless of good results, than any war in which we have been engaged since the time when we tried to compel the allegiance of the American Colonies."

Had he been told that, in days to come, he would himself lead this country into such a war, surely he would have exclaimed, "Is thy servant a dog that he should do this thing?"

I cannot enumerate all the questions which from time to time received the attention of the Federation. One of the earliest of these was the subject of Indian reform, and this has from time to time been further attended to, but neither from the Federation nor from Parliament has it even yet received the close and continuous attention which its great importance demands. The amendment of the Land Laws was also, in 1881, made the subject of special effort and, at the instance of Mr (afterwards Sir) Richard Tangye who subscribed £1000, a public fund was raised to promote sound information upon that and upon the principles of Free Trade, and £5000 in all was obtained. Many pamphlets upon these subjects were issued, and a large number of lectures upon them were delivered in this and succeeding years by men of special knowledge and ability.

ANNUAL MEETING, LIVERPOOL, 1881

The question of the Reform of the Land Laws was one of the principal matters considered at the Fourth Annual meeting of the Council of the Federation which was held at Liverpool on 25th October, 1881. A special resolution was passed, urging upon the members of the Federated Associations to support the special fund to promote Land Law reform, and to diffuse information as to the conditions on which the commercial and financial policy of the country ought to be conducted.

At this meeting Mr Henry Fell Pease was appointed President. The evening meeting was held in Hengler's Circus, and was addressed by Mr Chamberlain.

OBSTRUCTION

In 1882, in consequence of the determined obstruction which had been offered to the progress of legislation in the Session of 1881, it became necessary to reform the rules of procedure so as to limit the use of those forms of the House which had been resorted to for purely obstructive purposes. A circular was issued by the Federation to the Associated Liberal organisations upon the matter, and a general meeting was held to consider it. A small number of Liberal members supported Mr Marriott, who was then a Liberal Member for Brighton, in making an attack upon the Government, and the question was as to how far the proposed alterations had the support of the Associations. A large majority immediately met and passed resolutions strongly in support of the proposals. An autumn session had to be convened for the purpose of dealing with them. There were threats held out that the Conservative Party would attempt to turn this autumn session to other purposes by discussing matters arising out of the difficulties which had

arisen in Egypt, and a further circular was issued to the Federated Associations calling their attention to the fact. The most important constituencies moved in the matter, and gave such expression of opinion upon it that the Government was strengthened in carrying their projected reforms.

The legislation of the earlier part of the Session of 1882 was much delayed by grave difficulties arising in Ireland. Lord Frederick Cavendish and Mr Burke were murdered in the Phœnix Park in Dublin in May of that year. A Bill was introduced entitled, "The Protection of Life and Property Bill," and, upon this, two meetings of the General Committee were held in London and were largely attended, a special committee being appointed to consider the provisions of the Bill, and to suggest amendments. Some of the changes which they recommended were embodied in the measure, and the Federation may thus claim the credit of having, on the one hand, strengthened and guided public opinion in the support of measures deemed necessary for the maintenance of order, and, on the other, of having sought to mitigate the severity of the proposed enactment by recommending safeguards for individual and corporate freedom.

The Federation at the same time strongly urged the necessity of pressing forward a measure dealing with the arrears of rent, and when this measure was introduced and was threatened by the action of the Tory majority in the House of Lords, the utmost efforts of the Federation were put forward in support of the Bill, which was passed in spite of Lord Salisbury's advice to the Peers to reject it. By surrendering they avoided a collision which would, in all probability, have seriously affected their position as an hereditary and responsible branch of the legislature.

In the summer of this year Arabi Pasha raised (what was called) a rebellion in Egypt, and England intervened and subdued the rising and restored the

authority of the Khedive. I may note in passing that this was a very serious matter for the Liberal Party in many ways. The first trouble which sprang from it was that John Bright resigned office in consequence of the bombardment of Alexandria. The British army had a simple task in crushing the petty *émeute*. Then began the extraordinary work which has been carried on now for twenty-three years in Egypt by this country; from one point of view a great and beneficent work, putting order in the place of anarchy; from another point of view, and that, perhaps, the highest, we may fairly doubt whether the work has been successful. It is certain that the material condition of Egypt is better now than it was under the uncontrolled government of the Khedive, but, so far as the fitting of the people of the country to govern themselves is concerned, there has been perhaps nothing done; they are more dependent now upon the assistance of this country than they were when we began the work. There can be no doubt that our Government acted under strong conviction of duty, and with very great reluctance to use military force, but John Bright would have been false to the faith which he had held throughout life if he had not taken the step which he did take.

Two conferences of importance were held during this Federation year, one at Newcastle-upon-Tyne on the 23rd November 1881 and one at Nottingham on the 24th June 1882. At the Newcastle conference Mr Schnadhorst read a paper on "the next Reform Bill," and, the Right Honourable A. J. Mundella, M.P., who was to have spoken at the evening meeting having been prevented by illness, Mr John Morley consented to supply his place and he thus made the political acquaintance of his future constituents.

Sir Farrar Herschell, M.P., then Solicitor-General, addressed the evening meeting at the Nottingham conference, and, at the morning conference, a paper was read by Mr Powell Williams on the subject of

"County Government" Both conferences were remarkably successful.

During the year Mr William Harris, who had been the Chairman of the General Committee from the first, was compelled through ill-health to resign his office. His resignation was received with much regret, and, in the Annual Report of the proceedings of this year which was presented to the meeting of the Council held in Ashton-under-Lyne on the 19th December, a special acknowledgment was made of the value of the services rendered by Mr Harris to the Federation as one of its founders, as the Chairman of its Committee from the outset, and as a constant and most valuable adviser and worker on its behalf.

At that annual meeting a resolution of congratulation to Mr Gladstone on the completion of his fiftieth year in Parliament was passed, and the extension of the Franchise, the alteration of the Land Laws, and the necessity of a Corrupt Practices Act, were considered. We find, for the first time at one of the Annual meetings, the demand for Local Government in Counties and Rural Districts, which had been previously made at Conferences, confirmed. It was resolved that policy and justice alike demand that the local government of Counties and Rural Districts should be based upon representative principles, so that the people in such districts as well as those in towns, may have constitutional control over the expenditure of the funds to which they contribute and over the laws and regulations to which they are subject.

The Bradlaugh Question

At this time Mr Bradlaugh was being kept out of the House of Commons which would neither allow him to sit without taking the oath nor to take it although he was willing to do so. This matter had received the attention of the Executive from time to

time, and at the Ashton-under-Lyne Annual meeting a strong resolution was passed calling upon all Liberal Members to support Mr Bradlaugh's right to sit and vote in the House, and thus to maintain the free right of constituencies in the choice of their representatives. The evening meeting was addressed by the Right Honourable Joseph Chamberlain, M.P., President of the Board of Trade.

On the 20th April 1883, there was a largely attended meeting of the General Committee of the Federation when resolutions were adopted declaring it to be desirable that the Contagious Diseases Act should be repealed without delay, and strongly approving the Bill introduced by certain Members to permit the substitution of an affirmation for the Parliamentary oath, and expressing satisfaction that the Government had introduced a Corrupt Practices Bill which embodied many of the amendments suggested by the Federation. The Committee also expressed strong and active sympathy with the Liberals of the Metropolis in their endeavours to obtain an early and efficient reform of the Local Government of London. It had heard with much satisfaction that the Government would speedily introduce into Parliament a Bill with this object, and expressed its opinion that such a measure should give the management of the local affairs of the Metropolis to a representative body chosen by the ratepayers, and should accord to that body complete control over such matters as are entrusted to Municipal Corporations throughout the kingdom.

COUNTY FRANCHISE

At this time throughout the country but especially in the North of England the question of County Franchise, which had long been advocated by ardent reformers, was receiving great attention. Locke King got leave to bring in a Bill for this purpose in 1851, and he brought it forward every year until, on

his death, it fell into the hands of Sir G. O. Trevelyan, who had entered the House as Member for Tynemouth; and plain George Otto Trevelyan, in 1863. The long fight was now drawing to a close, the contest had become acute, victory was in the air. Large open-air meetings were held in favour of the Extension of the County Franchise, representative bodies of working-men held their own meetings also and passed strong resolutions upon the matter. In accordance with a resolution of the General Committee held on the 12th April the officers convened another meeting of that Committee for the 3rd May at the Westminster Palace Hotel. This was largely attended, and a resolution was adopted with heartiness and unanimity that the Government, having been placed in office by the Liberal Party in order that they might carry certain urgent measures of reform, amongst which the Extension of the Franchise to Householders in Counties occupied the first place, precedence ought thereafter to be accorded to the great measure of enfranchisement for which the residents in Counties, now excluded from electoral rights, had long and patiently waited, and it urged the Government to introduce in the next Session of Parliament a Bill to carry out this reform.

A second resolution was passed that, when the Franchise had been extended and the Register of the new electorate completed, there should follow a measure for the redistribution of seats to equalise power and to secure a true representation of all sections of the nation in the House of Commons.

The meeting further resolved that, in order to ascertain and formulate the opinions of the Liberal Party on Franchise questions, a conference of representatives of all Liberal organizations throughout the country should be held, and the officers were instructed to arrange for this, and invite the co-operation of the National Reform Union and the London and Counties Liberal Union. In pursuance of this decision a representative conference was held at

Leeds on the 17th and 18th October 1883, on the joint invitation of the National Liberal Federation and the two other bodies named. The Conference was organized upon a strictly representative basis, no persons but delegates nominated by Liberal Organizations being admitted. Mr John Morley, M.P. (who had then been elected Member for Newcastle-upon-Tyne), was President of the Conference which proved to be the largest and most influential assembly yet held in connection with the subject of Parliamentary reform. More than 2200 delegates, representing over 500 Liberal Organizations, were appointed to attend, and a most striking manifestation was afforded of the value and force of Liberal unity as organized by such a machinery of associations as that offered by the National Liberal Federation, and by the other convening bodies. The meeting was one of peculiar interest.

On the first day the urgency of the question of reform and the extension of the Franchise were debated, and Mr Kitson, the President of the Federation and of the Leeds Liberal Association, entertained the representatives in the evening at a Conversazione in the Town Hall.

There was a long and spirited discussion on the question of the urgency of reform. An attempt was made by some of the London representatives to carry a declaration that the reform of the local Government of London should have precedence in the legislation of next Session, but it was pointed out that, however important this was, and there was no doubt that it was of much importance, it was comparatively a local matter, whereas the reform of the Franchise was national. The proposal to give precedence to London reform was negatived by a great majority, and a resolution demanding the introduction of a Bill dealing with the extension of the Franchise in the next Session of Parliament was then unanimously adopted, together with other resolutions. One of these demanded equal electoral rights for house-

holders and lodgers in the counties to those enjoyed by householders and lodgers in the Parliamentary boroughs, a redistribution of seats after the extension of the Franchise, and the completion of the Register of the new electorate, so as to give as nearly as possible an equal value to every vote, and to secure a true expression of the will of the nation, the simplification of the present system of registration, shortening the period of qualification for the Franchise, granting a Ballot Act and extending the hours of polling.

Then occurred a very interesting episode. Miss Jane Cobden, one of Richard Cobden's daughters, proposed, and Mrs Helen Priestman Clark, John Bright's eldest daughter, seconded, "That, in the opinion of this meeting, any measure for the extension of the suffrage should confer the Franchise upon women who, possessing the qualifications which entitle men to vote, have now the right of voting in all matters of local government." This was carried unanimously. It would have been very difficult indeed to have got together any gathering of Liberals which would have gainsaid a resolution proposed by two ladies representing such noble Liberals as Cobden and Bright, but I may fairly say that, independent of any hereditary claims, the mover and seconder of the resolution by their simple, straightforward advocacy of the claim of their sex to consideration would have carried the meeting.

In the evening of the second day there was a crowded public meeting in the Town Hall over which the Right Honourable John Bright, M.P., presided, and at which he made one of the last of his great public speeches.

On the 30th October, on the joint invitation of the National Liberal Federation and the Glasgow Liberal Association, another conference of great importance was held in Glasgow, and was attended by about five hundred representatives of Liberal Organizations in all parts of Scotland. In the evening a great

public meeting was held in St Andrew's Hall when an address was delivered by the Right Honourable Sir Charles Dilke, M.P., President of the Local Government Board. At this conference the resolutions of the Leeds conference were adopted, and the meeting also considered the question of land tenure in Scotland, the Game Laws, and the necessity that the administration of Scotch business in Parliament should be entrusted to a Minister for Scotland. Both at Leeds and at Glasgow the resolutions of the conference condemned the attempt to secure the representation of minorities by special legislative enactments as a violation of the principle of popular representative government, but at Glasgow the amendment to make the words "householders in Counties" include "female householders" was rejected by a decisive majority.

JOHN BRIGHT AND BIRMINGHAM

This year was the twenty-fifth during which John Bright had represented Birmingham in Parliament. The Birmingham Liberal Association had arranged for the fitting celebration of the event, and the Committee and officers of the Federation, in compliance with the general desire, decided to invite the co-operation of the Liberal Associations generally in giving a national character to the demonstration in honour of the great Champion of Free Trade and progress and reform. The mass meeting on the 15th June was attended by a large number of delegates from Liberal Associations who presented to John Bright addresses from the bodies they represented and an Address was presented from the Federation itself. I cannot do better than give its exact words—

"The National Liberal Federation, representing Associations of Liberals in all parts of the kingdom, desires sincerely and cordially to join in the tribute of respect, gratitude, and affection, which is this day

accorded to you not only by the constituency which you have served so long and so well, but by the great Party of which you have been for many years a trusted and honoured Leader, and whose victories you have done more than any man to secure. There is no measure of reform, of freedom, or of progress, obtained since you entered upon public life which has not been hastened on by your wise and powerful advocacy. Endowed in a high degree with political prescience, your career exhibits a well-nigh unexampled consistency, and by none more worthy than yourself has the name of 'statesman' ever been attained. Condemning, from the first, selfishness and mistrust among classes and separation and hostility among nations, you have striven with matchless eloquence and force to assert the claims of equal citizenship and common humanity, and to establish universal peace and goodwill among men. Throughout a long life you have pleaded the cause of the friendless and distressed, and in America, in India, and in Ireland, your name is held in remembrance by many thankful hearts. Mainly from your hands—and those of another true statesman,—Richard Cobden,—the nation received the gift of cheap and plentiful food, and the prosperity which follows in their wake. A life, a character, and a service, such as this, deserves the most cordial recognition and the truest praise. Coveting neither power or place; caring only for good; seeking justice and freedom for all, anxious for 'the dawn of a brighter and better day for the people whom you love so well' you have played a conspicuous, an unselfish and a noble part in the history of your country and your age, and have added to its records a lasting and revered name."

Annual Meeting at Bristol

The Sixth Annual meeting of the Federation was held at Bristol on November 26th, 1883, when Mr

James Kitson was appointed President, and, at the evening public meeting in Colston Hall, the Right Honourable J. Chamberlain, M.P., delivered an address. The Leeds conference resolutions on Parliamentary reform were confirmed, with the following rider moved by Mr Lewis Fry, M.P., and seconded by the Reverend Dr Caldecott: "That in the opinion of this meeting any other extension of the suffrage should confer the franchise upon women who, possessing the qualifications which enable men to vote, have now the right to vote in all matters of local government."

Other resolutions dealt with the hours of polling and London Municipal reform, and the public meeting in Colston Hall placed on record its opinion that "in giving precedence during the coming Session to a great measure of enfranchisement the Government would meet the just wishes and expectations of the country, and receive the hearty and unanimous support of the Liberal Party."

In the Session of 1884 the Parliamentary Corrupt and Illegal Practices Act of 1883 was supplemented by a similar measure relating to Municipal, School Board, and other local elections, and the extension of the hours of polling from 8 a.m. to 8 p.m. at Parliamentary and Municipal elections was carried into law.

REDISTRIBUTION

A special meeting of the General Committee was called together at Birmingham on the 7th December 1883, at which a sub-committee was appointed to consider and report on the question of Redistribution, especially with regard to the principles upon which a measure for that purpose should be based. This Committee held its first meeting on 21st January 1884, when it adjourned until the 12th February. Then certain important resolutions were prepared to be submitted to the General Committee. It was clear

however that the Franchise Bill (upon which any scheme of redistribution would necessarily be dependent) would meet with determined opposition in the House of Lords, and the declaration of the views of the Federation upon the delicate question of the re-arrangement of the constituencies would, at this time, have been premature and possibly harmful.

On the 31st January 1884 the resolutions passed at the Leeds Conference were presented to Mr Gladstone by a deputation which was introduced by Mr John Morley, M.P., and, in his reply, Mr Gladstone led the deputation to understand that the Government were at last about to deal with the Franchise question.

The Bill was introduced to the House of Commons by the Prime Minister in a memorable speech on the 28th February. It was received by the country with eager approval, and it was recognised as being as complete a measure of electoral reform as the circumstances permitted, or as the entire Liberal Party would in all probability accept.

The Bill was subject from the commencement to tactics of obstruction and delay by the Tory Party. A section of Liberals also, in spite of Mr Gladstone's earnest request that they should sink their individual preferences, and not seek to encumber the Bill with provisions which would afford a pretext for the hostile opposition of the Tories, announced their intention to endeavour to insert provisions dealing with the representation of minorities, and thus five weeks of the Session elapsed without any real progress being made.

The General Committee was summoned, for the 10th March 1884, to a meeting to be held in Birmingham which was largely attended. It passed resolutions rejoicing that the Government had recognized the urgency of the question of reform, regarding the provisions of the Bill as a most satisfactory redemption of the pledges given at the General Election in 1880, and earnestly trusting that no amendment calculated to impede its progress

would proceed from the Liberal side of the House; it approved of the separation of the extension of the Franchise from the question of redistribution, and reaffirmed the objection expressed at the Leeds Conference to the representation of minorities by special legislative enactment; and it declared that in the opinion of this meeting the open and veiled obstruction by which the Tory Party in the House of Commons was seeking to discredit the Government and to divert public attention from domestic legislation, so as to prevent the progress of reform, was deserving of the strongest condemnation of all who valued representative government.

The Bill passed its Third Reading in the House of Commons on the 26th June, but it was even then practically certain that a very different fate awaited it in the House of Lords. This was made abundantly clear by a meeting of Conservative Peers followed by a notice of motion given by Lord Cairns, and it was certain that the Tory majority in that House had determined to set themselves in direct opposition to the will of the people as declared at the last General Election. It was therefore evident that the country was in front of a grave constitutional crisis, and a circular was issued from the Federation to the Federated Associations calling their attention to the fact that it was for the Liberal Party to say that Mr Gladstone and his colleagues would not rely in vain on the support of the people in dealing with this crisis in a resolute and decisive manner.

The Bill was rejected by the House of Lords. A meeting of the General Committee was held at Westminster Palace Hotel on the 10th June, in answer to a summons issued on the 8th, at which the whole country was represented by an unusually large number of influential delegates. Amidst great enthusiasm resolutions were passed protesting against the rejection of the Franchise Bill by the House of Lords, and asking that it might be introduced in an Autumn Session, and might be persistently returned

to the House of Lords, and assuring the Prime Minister and his colleagues of the earnest and enthusiastic support of the Liberal Party in carrying this struggle which that House had provoked to a triumphant issue.

One of these resolutions I must quote *in extenso* because it shows what view of the action of the Peers was taken by the Federation at that time, and at that time it had the active support of the Birmingham Party who now sit on the Tory side of the House and bask in the sunshine of the aristocracy. It is well for us always to remember the accumulated wrongs which we have submitted to from the Lords, and the certainty that, until the power of that House is crippled, all legislation which any Liberal Government may propose will have to be prepared and pruned and emasculated to suit the views of that which is neither more nor less than a Tory Club. The resolution was, "That in the opinion of this meeting the refusal by a selfish majority of an irresponsible and non-representative body to give effect to a measure of enfranchisement approved by the great majority of the House of Commons, and finally passed by that House without a dissentient vote, is an unjustifiable and intolerable exercise of the power of revision entrusted to the House of Peers, and is a direct challenge for the commencement of a conflict which shall never cease until the legislative functions of the Second Chamber are so changed as to bring them into harmony with the principles of popular and representative government."

The meeting further requested the officers of the Federation to invite the co-operation of the National Reform Union and the London and Counties Liberal Union in convening the representatives who attended at Leeds and others who might be appointed to a conference to be held in London at the earliest possible date.

The heather was now fairly on fire. The Con-

ference was held at St. James' Hall on the 30th July, and no fewer than 2000 representatives gathered together. Mr Morley again presided and he aroused the most intense enthusiasm by a declaration that "No power on earth can henceforth separate the question of mending the House of Commons from the other question of mending or ending the House of Lords."

The meeting was one of extraordinary determination. It sat for three hours and made it fully manifest that the Liberal Party throughout the kingdom was firm and united in support of the Bill, and eager in its hostility to the action of the House of Lords, and a resolution condemning the action of that House as factious and unpatriotic, and expressing approval of the decision of the Government to hold an Autumn Session in order to secure the passing of the Franchise Bill, and assuring them of "its hearty support in whatever measures it may determine to adopt in maintaining the principle that the House of Lords does not possess and shall not arrogate to itself the right to dictate to the People's Representative House the time for the dissolution of Parliament," was moved by Sir John Lubbock, M.P., and carried enthusiastically. To this there was added one which is still to be carried into effect. With Alderman J. Powell Williams as seconder, it was resolved "That in the opinion of this meeting the habitual disregard of the national will manifested by the House of Lords in delaying, mutilating, and rejecting, legislation demanded by the constituencies and approved by the House of Commons, renders necessary such a Reform of the Constitution as will put an end to the power of the House of Lords to thwart and deny the will of the people."

Resolutions perhaps even a little stronger than these were carried at the Seventh Annual meeting of the Council in 1884, which was held at Stoke on Trent on the 7th October following this Conference, one being moved by Mr Jesse Collings, M.P., seconded by Mr (now Sir) E. R. Russell, and the other moved

by the Rev. Dr Crosskey and seconded by Mr Cropper.

The last resolution declared "That, inasmuch as during many past years measures just in themselves, necessary for the well-being of the people, and approved by the House of Commons, have been habitually subjected to mutilation, vexatious delay, or rejection, by the House of Lords, this meeting is of opinion that the time has come for such a revision of the Constitution as will effectually limit the power of veto which the Peers now possess, or will deprive them of legislative functions."

By this time the excitement in the country had grown intense. The Houses of Parliament met on the 23rd October, and on the 11th November the Franchise Bill had passed its Third Reading; the House of Lords gave way and accepted the Bill, Mr Gladstone undertaking to produce a Redistribution Bill, which he did on the 1st December. The Lords once again had been wise in time, and their inevitable ultimate fate had been postponed, but in the Annual Report presented to the meeting of the Council of the Federation held at Bradford on the 1st October 1885, in recording the facts as to the conflict which was thus happily ended, it is well stated "the time is not far distant when legislative effect will have to be given to the opinion expressed a quarter of a century ago by John Bright that an hereditary house of legislature cannot be a permanent institution in a free country."

THE SOUDAN

I must now return to the position which we had assumed in Egypt and the difficulties in which we found ourselves involved. The question of the Soudan had become uppermost. Very few people in this country knew anything about the Soudan. I remember on one occasion in 1883 being in the lobby of the House of Commons and asking the first twelve Members I knew, sitting on either side of the

House, what Egypt had to do with the Soudan and when it became interested in it. I had many curious answers. One or two frankly said they did not know anything about it; several said they believed it came into the hands of Egypt when Joseph was Potiphar's lieutenant, and only one (appropriately then the Liberal Member for Cambridge) knew all about it. As a matter of fact, Egypt had held it for about sixty years, and had misgoverned it the whole of the time. Its rule was atrociously bad, and when the Mahdi proclaimed himself as the deliverer of the Soudanese from the Egyptians and as a religious reformer he obtained ready credence; there can be no doubt that the original rising was a great popular movement.

The question at once arose as to whether the Egyptian Government should abandon its hold upon the Soudan or whether warlike measures should be taken to endeavour to keep it. Most unfortunately, and in spite of many of the men who knew most about it, it was determined to endeavour to reconquer it, and Hicks Pacha's expedition went forward with the view of carrying out the impossible task. At first he had small successes, but on his march to El Obeid his whole force was annihilated and he himself slain. This was in November 1883. There was a very general agreement at this time that the Soudanese were right in rising, (Mr Gladstone spoke of them as "a people rightly struggling to be free"), and that the Egyptian Government had never been able really to conquer and govern the Soudan, and that that country should be completely abandoned. General Gordon was consulted by the Government, and thought that the policy of evacuation was the right one, but there were certain places which were garrisoned by Egyptian troops and which the Mahdi had not succeeded in taking, and which must be considered. Although he himself thought it would be better for our Government not to interfere, it was decided at the

very beginning of 1884 that he should go to Khartoum, and should, if possible, remove the garrison of that place and the inhabitants to Suakin. Most of the persons on the spot and those who knew General Gordon well, agreed that he would be the best man to do this as he had great personal influence with the tribes in the neighbourhood of Khartoum, and he undertook to go out and to carry out the policy of peaceful evacuation. His was to be a peaceful mission and great hopes were placed upon it, but there were those who felt that a man who was, above everything, a born warrior, was scarcely likely to prove the best ambassador of peace. He reached Khartoum, and, for a short time, his mission seemed to be successful, but within a very few weeks he was besieged and began to send home accounts of the beautiful practice he was making with certain new cannon which had been taken out to Khartoum, and the inevitable end came. There was a wild cry raised throughout this country for vengeance. A relief expedition had been sent out, but it was too late, by a few days only, to succeed in saving a man who, whatever might be his faults, was undoubtedly a noble man and a true hero.

The question now was whether our troops should retire altogether from the Soudan, assisting such garrisons as desired to do so to quit the places they were holding, or whether we should go on to conquer the land. Our Government was divided upon the matter. Several Associations urged the officers of the Federation to call a meeting of the General Committee to consider it, and, at length, after a prolonged correspondence, they consented to do so. The meeting was held at Birmingham on the 17th April 1885; it was largely attended and there was a long and exciting discussion, but ultimately the following resolution was passed by an overwhelming majority: "That this meeting expresses its continued and hearty confidence in the policy of Her Majesty's Government and assures Mr Gladstone and his

Government of its continued support. It deeply regrets that military operations should have been deemed necessary in the Soudan, and confidently relies upon the assurance of the Government that their policy will be directed to the withdrawal of our troops at the earliest possible moment."

Those who took part in that meeting will be reminded by the uncertain wording of the resolution of the able but rather too adroit tactics which were displayed by the small party present who thirsted for more war. The first sentence of the original resolution was moved as an amendment to the resolution itself, "That this meeting expresses its continued and hearty confidence in the policy of Her Majesty's Government and assures Mr Gladstone and his Government of its continued support." This, of course, everyone had to vote for. The General Committee of the National Liberal Federation was not going to negative a resolution of this kind, but, when it was put to the meeting as a substantive motion, the remainder of the original resolution was proposed as an amendment, and it was this full resolution which was carried by a majority of 107 to 5.

The policy indicated in it was adopted by the Government and, in pursuance of it, the evacuation of the Soudan was rapidly proceeded with.

It is difficult now, when more than twenty years have passed, to recall the state of feeling in England at the time when General Gordon lost his life. From time to time those of us who have been long engaged in political warfare are painfully aware of the fact that a kind of frenzy sweeps at uncertain periods over our whole nation. It is nearly always in connection with war or bears a close relationship to that calamity. The Crimean war, the Indian Mutiny, the death of General Gordon, the skirmish at Majuba Hill, and the recent war in South Africa, are instances of such frenzy. Now indeed the existence of the Yellow Press, and the necessity which it appears to be under

of living by the habitual fostering of the worst passions and prejudices of different peoples, would go far to unsettle the national mind in this and other countries altogether, if it were not that "Wolf, wolf" has been cried so often that the repetition begins to pall and to lose its effect. But there can be no doubt that the loss of General Gordon at Khartoum, carefully exaggerated by the Tory Party for political reasons, produced in this country an effect infinitely greater than the more terrible loss of Sir Louis Cavagnari and his army at Cabul had done.

It is desirable to remember that, when Lord Salisbury became Prime Minister, he did not attempt to reverse the policy of the Liberal Government with respect to the Soudan but in fact endorsed it, stating, in 1888, that he did not depart in any degree from the policy of leaving the Soudan, and pointing out the cost of blood and treasure and the continuous expenditure which would be necessary if that policy were to be departed from. He defended retaining Suakin because it was a serious obstacle to the renewal and conduct of the slave trade which was always trying to pass over from Africa into Asia, but he added, "I do not think that the retention of Suakin is of any advantage to the Egyptian Government. If I were to speak purely from the point of view of that Government's own interest, I should say abandon Suakin at once." It was not until 1896 that a different view prevailed in the then Tory Government, and we shall see, when we come to that part of this story, the reasons which led them to abandon the policy which had been continuously that of both parties for thirteen years.

The Parliamentary Session of 1885 was chiefly occupied with the consideration of the details of a Redistribution Bill. The Ministry was in a very unsatisfactory state. Resignations and threats of resignation were frequent, obstruction and votes of censure were the order of the day, and at length, by a combination between the Tory Party and the

Irish, a hostile amendment was carried upon a fiscal question in the House of Commons and the Government resigned.

The amendment was apparently directed against the proposal to place an additional duty upon intoxicating liquors, but really it had a very different object. Beer and spirits had been always held sacred by the Tories, but, if they are Holy, the land is the Holiest of Holies. "What is the cause of this tremendous opposition?" asked Mr Gladstone in the House of Commons. "It is not in compassion of the drinker of beer; it is not in the anomaly, if there is an anomaly, of the taxation of spirits. It is the death duties and because in dealing with those duties my Honourable friend has affected landed property."

The result was that a Ministry, in a great majority in the House of Commons and a still greater majority in the country, was compelled to give place to a temporary Administration which was in a minority in the Representative House of the Legislature. Lord Salisbury became Prime Minister. The Government carried on until October with the consent of the Liberal Party. It then dissolved Parliament and was ejected from office by the result of the General Election.

ANNUAL MEETING AT BRADFORD, 1885

But before speaking of the General Election which followed the Dissolution, I must return to the Annual meeting at Bradford and the Report which was presented to it. It showed that the Federation was actively at work. At Ipswich, Warrington, and Plymouth, Conferences had been held since the last meeting, and two others had been fixed for Reading and Chester. At Ipswich and Warrington, Mr Chamberlain, and at Plymouth, Sir William Harcourt, addressed evening meetings. Lecturers had been sent into twenty-seven of the English Counties and the eagerness of the new electors to receive informa-

tion had been most marked, especially in the purely agricultural districts, while the attendance at and interest manifested in the various gatherings had been altogether unprecedented. The number of meetings held since the beginning of the year had been largely in excess of those held during any other period since the establishment of the Federation, and the publication and distribution of literature had been on a scale of unusual magnitude. Millions of pamphlets, tracts, and leaflets had been supplied, most of them gratuitously, for distribution to the new electorate, and the demand had in nowise decreased. During the three weeks before the meeting at Bradford no less than half a million Federation leaflets had been supplied for the purposes of distribution. The officers desired to call attention to the publication of a Radical Programme in a series of articles which had been reprinted from the *Fortnightly Review* and issued with a preface by the Right Honourable J. Chamberlain, M.P. "These articles contain a synopsis of the Radical doctrines, and without pledging themselves to all the proposals contained in them the officers earnestly request the assistance of the Federated Associations in obtaining for the volume an extensive circulation."

At the conferences which I have mentioned the principal matters for consideration were the reform of the system of land tenure and the establishment of a system of Local Government by County Boards, elected by the people and thoroughly representative, throughout the United Kingdom. The belief was expressed "That such a reform by relieving the House of Commons of work which is merely local would promote the efficiency of Parliament for Imperial legislation, and would secure a more equitable adjustment of local burdens and a more economic administration of local taxation."

The imminence of the General Election lent special interest to the proceedings at the Bradford meeting, and the attendance of representatives was

unusually large. The first resolution passed expressed the opinion "That the interests of agriculture, the welfare of the nation, and, the condition of those who labour on the soil, require that the laws of primogeniture, entail, and settlement should be repealed, that security of tenure and compensation for improvements should be made the legal right of every tenant, that a compulsory system of registration of title for the purpose of facilitating the transfer of land should be established, that means should be afforded for the enfranchisement of leaseholders, and that, in order to enable agricultural labourers to become permanent holders, powers should be given to representative Local Authorities for the acquisition of land, if necessary by compulsory purchase."

After this Free Education, Local Self-Government, and the Disestablishment and Disendowment of the English, Welsh, and Scotch Churches, were asked for, and the policy of Lords Beaconsfield and Salisbury in insisting upon the insertion in the Treaty of Berlin of provisions for the arbitrary separation of the Bulgarian people into two Principalities was condemned.

CHAPTER II

THE PARTING OF THE WAYS

General Election, 1885: Home Rule—Removal of Federation Offices to London, 1886—Annual Meeting, Leeds, 1886—Conferences on Home Rule, etc.—Liberal and Radical Union—Annual Meeting, Nottingham, 1887—Local Government—*Times* charges against Irish Leaders—Annual Meeting, Birmingham, 1888—Administration of Crimes Act—Annual General Committee, Nottingham, 1889—Annual Meeting, Manchester—Special Council Meeting, February 1890, to consider result of Parnell Commission—Annual Meeting, Sheffield, 1890—First breakfast to Agents—Labour Representation—Free Education—Extension of Local Government—Annual Meeting, Newcastle-upon-Tyne, 1891—Mr Gladstone's last speech to the Federation—Agricultural Conference—London County Council and General Elections—Annual Meeting, Liverpool, 1893—Home Rule Bill—Parish Councils' Bill—Annual Meeting at Portsmouth, 1894—Mr Gladstone's Retirement—Leeds Conference on House of Lords—Parish Councils' Act Meetings—Equalisation of Death Duties—Mr Schnadhorst's Retirement—Annual Meeting, Cardiff, 1895—Welsh Disestablishment—Snatch defeat of Government.

GENERAL ELECTION, 1885: HOME RULE

THE General Election in October—November 1885 was something of a disappointment for the Liberal Party, and this was chiefly caused by Mr Parnell's issuing a Manifesto which called upon Irish Electors to cast their votes solidly for the Tory Party. The House of Commons which met on 21st January 1886 was composed of 335 Liberals, 249 Conservatives, and 86 Nationalists. The Tory Government had not a long tenure of office and it fell upon the question of

Ireland. Mr W. H. Smith was sent over on a Commission of Inquiry, which occupied sixty hours from London to Dublin and return, and shortly afterwards the Government announced its determination to bring in a Bill for the suppression of the National League, and, upon an amendment to the Address, moved by Mr Jesse Collings, which regretted the absence of any promise of a measure which could benefit the agricultural labourer, the Government was in a minority of seventy-nine. "The agricultural labourer" really meant Ireland. Mr Gladstone was, for the third time, sent for to form a Ministry. This he succeeded in doing, and on the 8th April 1886 he introduced his Home Rule Bill, and the great split of the Liberal Party followed thereupon. On April the 6th, the officers of the Federation had issued a circular to the Federated Associations asking them to call their members together so soon as the Government proposals with respect to Ireland were known so that the provisions of the measure might be taken into consideration, and stating that a meeting of the General Committee would be held in London at an early date at which the rank and file of the Party should be able to speak with full representative authority. This meeting was held on 5th May at the Westminster Palace Hotel. The President of the Association, Mr (now Sir) James Kitson, was in the chair, and the number of delegates attending was unprecedented. The President explained at once that, as he supported Mr Gladstone's policy, he was not able to propose the resolution which the officers had prepared. Mr William Harris then moved and the Honourable Philip Stanhope seconded "That this meeting desires that a permanent settlement of the Irish question should be effected on the basis of entrusting the people of Ireland with a large control over their domestic affairs by means of a legislative representative assembly, and recognises in the Irish Government Bill the foundations of such a settlement; that, declaring its confidence in Mr Gladstone, this meeting

earnestly requests him to accept such an amendment of the Bill by the retention of Irish representatives at Westminster as will render possible the union of all sound Liberals in passing a measure for the good government of Ireland." To this Mr J. E. Ellis, M.P., moved the following amendment, which was seconded by Mr J. S. Mathers of Leeds, "That this meeting recognizes that the time has come for the permanent settlement of the Irish problem, and believes that the principle of self-government, embodied in the Government of Ireland Bill of the Prime Minister, affords a means for such a solution of the difficulty. It therefore thanks Mr Gladstone for his measure, expresses its unabated confidence in the Government, over which he presides, and assures him of its earnest support in the present crisis."

Then followed a long and animated discussion. From the first it was evident that the representatives present were under a deep sense of responsibility. It was well understood that the mere question of the retention of the Irish Members at Westminster was not the matter really at stake, but that the issue was that of Home Rule and nothing else. The meeting was clearly felt by all to be one of the most momentous events of their political lives. There was no desire to part asunder, but there was a clear apprehension of the fact that a complete severance might possibly be the result of the decision come to. The tone of argument on both sides was firm but courteous; there was no wavering. Even those who appealed most strongly for unity had no idea of conceding the grave principle at stake whichever view of it they inclined to. It was evident that the officers of the Federation were in a minority. The meeting thrilled at the Chairman's simple explanation that he could not move the resolution prepared by the officers of the Federation over which he presided. The position was a novel one, but he and the meeting were equal to the occasion. The amendment was carried by an overwhelming majority, and was communicated at

once to Mr Gladstone, who received it with much pleasure.

Six members of the General Committee immediately resigned. Dr (now Sir Walter) Foster, then the Member for Chester, was elected Chairman of the Committee, and instead of filling the places of those resigning, an Emergency Committee was formed. It was hoped that some of them, at all events, would speedily resume their connection with the Federation. Several influential Members also withdrew, amongst them being Mr Joseph Chamberlain, but on the other hand more than seventy Members of Parliament who had not previously been connected with it sent in their adhesion to the Federation; not one Liberal Association withdrew from it, but within a month afterwards fifty fresh ones became affiliated; and, almost without exception, the whole of that important body, the Liberal Agents, remained loyal to the Party and to the cause of Home Rule which had now become its own.

It has since been made evident that the bond which had united the secessionists to the Liberal Party had been as brittle as green withes, for with scarcely an exception they have trampled upon every one of the articles of Liberal faith which they once held dear and had so earnestly advocated. Now that nearly twenty years are passed since the split it is impossible to distinguish the difference, by the outward or inward eye, between Tory Unionists and Liberal Unionists. If a Member of Parliament or a prominent politician in the country is specially and enthusiastically retrograde and reactionary, if he hastens to buttress the Church and the landed interests, if he demands and advocates the ruin of national education, laughs at the constant increase of national expenditure, prays for the restoration of protection, glories in unjust wars, revels in militarism, preaches the blessed doctrine that might is right, condemns the idea of nationality, ridicules the brotherhood of man and mocks at the union of hearts, there is no room for speculation as to his

origin; he was a Liberal Unionist but is a Tory of the Tories. If these men had not left us on Home Rule they must have gone whenever any Liberal principle had to be put into practice, for the root of the matter was not in them. I may be allowed to note how splendidly Mr Gladstone fought the Home Rule Bill in the House of Commons. He was old, he had lost from his side many of his oldest and strongest friends, he had lost men who had been his great allies in the Cabinet. The very introduction of the measure had aroused passions such as the oldest of us have not seen in any other domestic political matter. He had remained strong, firm, alert, pouring out magnificent orations filled with the strongest and clearest argument, and he was defeated upon the Second Reading by a majority of thirty, ninety-three Liberals voting against him. He was pressed to resign but he determined to dissolve, for resignation would have meant that he had accepted his defeat and given up the struggle. The Election which followed was one of intense excitement, and resulted in a Unionist majority of 110.

The battle for Home Rule which had thus begun was a long one, and indeed it is not over yet. All persons were mistaken upon the question of when it would be finally won or lost. Home Rulers did not believe that a coalition between a Party and a section of another Party which held in the main different principles, could, for more than a few years, hold together without absolute collision or separation. They had not conceived the possibility of the men, with whom they had worked side by side for generations, quite suddenly getting rid of all the principles which they professed to hold sacred, and eagerly and enthusiastically adopting their opponents' point of view. The attempt to preserve a distinction without a difference continued for many years, and the alliance did not really become a complete fusion until it had lasted nearly ten years.

But the secessionists also reckoned without their

host. They had not taken into account the dynamic force of intense belief in one man who was able to give expression to the intense faith which he himself held, the real vitality of a true union of hearts, the saving influence, for peoples as well as for individuals, of a real conviction of error. Mr Chamberlain indeed gave expression to the belief (which was widely shared) that no great altruistic agitation in which the welfare of any other country was really the object could last more than two years. For six years the Home Rule fight was fiercely waged, and, but for the personal failing of one great Leader, long ere this it would have been crowned by victory.

The Federation year which elapsed between the Annual meeting at Bradford and that at Leeds was naturally chiefly occupied by the general elections which took place within it, and the absorbing nature of the Irish controversy very much prevented the consideration of general subjects.

In October 1885 an important conference was held at Reading in which the question of a reform of Procedure, which would prevent wilful obstruction and enable the will of the people, as represented by the majority of the House of Commons, to prevail, and allow the work of legislation to proceed with reasonable and proper expedition, as well as the reform of the Land Laws, and local self-government, which should include the granting and control of licences, were considered and resolutions approving of them were passed. The Right Honourable G. Shaw Lefevre, M.P., addressed the conference, and a great meeting held in the Town Hall in the evening had the advantage of the striking eloquence of the Right Honourable H. H. Fowler, M.P.

Removal of Federation Offices to London, 1886

One of the results of the great Party split was the determination to remove the central offices of the

Federation from Birmingham to London. An informal vote was taken at a meeting of the General Committee on 10th September 1886, and it was found that, with one dissentient, the whole of the members then present were in favour of such a change. The Emergency Committee were desired to consider the question and report to a future meeting. That meeting was held on the 19th October, the Committee unanimously agreeing to make the recommendation, but with the distinct understanding that the provincial character of the Federation was not to be diminished, and no step should be taken which, in any sense, would separate the Executive of the Federation from the active and vigorous political life of the provinces from which it had received its chief strength and inspiration. The Committee recommended that no departure should be made from the custom of holding the Annual meeting of the Federation in one or other of the provincial centres.

The extraordinary impulse which the Party split had given to the Federation had very largely increased its work, and the removal to London added greatly to the strain which was laid upon the Secretary. Mr Schnadhorst became practically the official representative of the Federation, the referee to whom all the difficulties and doubts of Liberal constituencies were submitted; and our present Secretary, then Mr Robert A. Hudson, was appointed by the General Committee to the post of Assistant Secretary, and this appointment was regarded as most satisfactory. It has since proved to have been a fortunate step indeed for the Federation.

Annual Meeting, Leeds

The Ninth Annual meeting, which was held at Leeds on 3rd November 1886, was one of unusual importance for, as already stated, during the year which had elapsed since the meeting at Bradford, Mr Gladstone's Home Rule Bill had been defeated in the House of

Commons, and a Conservative Government had succeeded to office by virtue of the majority obtained by them at the General Election which followed. The first business of this Liberal gathering was to formulate the Home Rule view of the Liberal Party, which was done in the following resolution, unanimously adopted and never since departed from: "That the best interests both of Great Britain and Ireland imperatively require that the great effort to give better government to Ireland, begun by Mr Gladstone, should be firmly persevered in until a durable settlement is arrived at; that such a settlement must meet the views and wishes of the Irish Electors, as expressed by their constitutional representatives in Parliament, and that the only plan, which will satisfy either the justice or the policy of the case, is that of an Irish legislative body for the management of what Parliament shall decide to be distinctively Irish affairs."

Before this resolution was proposed, Sir James Kitson, the President, moved, and the Honourable Philip Stanhope (now Lord Weardale) seconded, "That this meeting expresses its continued and unabated confidence in Mr Gladstone as the Leader of the Liberal Party." This was at once unanimously agreed to with much enthusiasm. Indeed all the meetings at Leeds were remarkable for the strong testimony they bore to the popular sanction of the course which the officers of the Federation had followed.

The Manifesto which had been published by the Federation on 7th August 1886, and which had excited some anger amongst the opponents of a policy of concession towards Ireland, stated that "The Irish Question occupies the first place in the politics of the day. No Government, no Parliament, no Party, will be able to ignore it. Until it has been settled, no progress can be made with the ordinary work of the Liberal Party nor will it be possible for the Conservatives to indulge in a congenial inactivity while this problem remains unsolved." The truth which was thus expressed was ridiculed at the time by those

who maintained that the Election of 1886 had finally settled the controversy on Home Rule and opened the way for legislative work in other directions, but the experience of the Session was that never before had the House of Commons been so completely absorbed by the consideration of the Irish question. All the time and the strength, not only of Ministers but of private members, were devoted solely to the further discussion of the problem which according to our opponents was finally solved by the decision of the electors in 1886.

Again, during the General Election, it was passionately denied by our opponents that the choice with regard to Ireland lay between a policy of concession and one of coercion; but the Election was no sooner over than the pretence of attempting the government of Ireland by the same laws as the other parts of the United Kingdom was abandoned, and the whole country saw that there was no middle course and that the choice did really lie between conciliation and coercion.

The intense interest taken in these questions, not only by the representatives of Liberal Associations, but by the public at large, was convincingly shown at the great public meetings held in Leeds on the evening of the 3rd November, one of which was in the Coliseum and presided over by the Right Honourable John Morley, M.P., and another great overflow meeting at which Mr (now the Right Honourable) Herbert J. Gladstone, M.P., was Chairman. Both of these were densely crowded and, according to the estimate of the London *Times* newspaper, were together attended by 10,000 persons. The resolutions which had been passed at the Council meetings of the Federation were unanimously and heartily adopted by both of the evening meetings. The principal speakers, in addition to the two Chairmen, were the Right Honourable Sir William Harcourt, M.P., Lord Houghton, Mr Broadhurst, M.P., Sir Walter Foster, M.P., Sir Wilfrid Lawson, M.P., the Honourable Bernard Coleridge, M.P., and Mr Picton, M.P. It was

upon the occasion of the meeting in the Coliseum that Mr Morley, speaking of one of the seceders who appeared to be an impatient aspirant to Mr Gladstone's shoes, aroused the great gathering to a wild outburst of intense enthusiasm by declaring that, as regarded the Leadership of the Liberal Party, "there is no vacancy."

One of the results of removing the central offices of the Federation to London was a considerable alteration in the character of the Association. It has never departed from its primary object, that of ascertaining the will and desire of the preponderating majority of the Liberal Party and taking all steps in its power to have these carried into law; and it has continued to aid the efficient organization of the Party in every part of the country, and to furnish the constituencies with the means of political education. But, although no one will dispute the importance of a great city like Birmingham, as a centre it cannot for a moment enter into active competition with the Metropolis. Speaking generally, there is no place in England or Scotland which is so easily reached from all other places as London. In spite of its intense provincialism in many matters it is still the centre, and more than ever the centre, of all great endeavour in the United Kingdom. As is often said, when you are in London you are at the head-quarters of everything. The provincialism I have alluded to is rapidly disappearing, and it is no longer possible to say that London is the place to which those who cannot succeed in the provinces naturally gravitate. At length public spirit exists in most parts of the great collection of houses. There probably never can be, in such a capital, the devoted energy which is found in most of the large cities of the United Kingdom, and which is chiefly inspired by honest local pride in the place and its surrounding districts. But, for all purposes of gatherings upon national subjects, for all meetings of political, scientific, and social societies which appeal in their objects to the whole country;

for the purpose of the collection of facts upon any matter, and convenience of consultation and acquisition of such facts by those who are specially interested, there is no other place which can compare with it for excellence. Since the National Liberal Federation moved to London the ease, and therefore the frequency, with which it has been consulted by the Federated Associations has been enormously increased. It has been brought into relationship, in certain administrative respects, with the Liberal Central Association, which is an official organization having as its head the Chief Whip and dealing, amongst other things, with that part of political organization which is concerned in every respect with the Membership of the House of Commons, and particularly with the actual machinery of elections. The work of political organization and of the steps which have to be taken, often greatly in advance of and preparatory to elections in the different districts, has more and more devolved upon the National Liberal Federation. It has been found better for both bodies so as to prevent overlapping and possible collision, whilst each rigidly preserves its own domains from interference by the other, to carry on the administrative work common to both jointly, but there has never been any attempt upon the part of either to influence the action of the other in its own department. The work, the direction, the finances, of each have been kept entirely separate. There has been constant consultation and agreement on details common to both, and, where it was clearly necessary from the circumstances of the case, there has been joint action, but the Federation has assuredly assumed a more national character than it could ever have done if it had remained in a provincial home, whilst it has retained its absolute independence of Front Bench influence, and has kept well in touch with the Federated Associations throughout the country which are its constituent parts.

The twelve months which elapsed between the

remarkable Annual Meeting at Leeds in October 1886 and that not less remarkable meeting held in the following October at Nottingham, were times in which much valuable work was done. Then began that extraordinary missionary enterprise upon behalf of Ireland, which did so much to spread the knowledge of the true story of English dealings with that unhappy country, and in which large numbers of ardent and enthusiastic labourers were engaged during the whole of the five years from 1886 to 1891. The task which the Liberal Party took upon itself was indeed a heavy one, and the success which it will be seen was really achieved was phenomenal. It was no less than to persuade the great majority (the principal partner), in Great Britain and Ireland to accept with devotion a struggle for a cause which was not its own, but that of a minority largely disliked and entirely misunderstood. It was indeed a Herculean task.

But the Party was led by a man who was a born leader of men, one whose very countenance inspired enthusiasm; a man who had attained a period of life when, in his own words, "Nature craves repose," but he retained the vigour, the energy, the power of appreciating new circumstances and new things, which are usually the property of youth, whilst he possessed the ripe experience of his full years. Never before in the history of British politics was there so extraordinary an uprising; the whole country was aflame; in every part Home Rule meetings were being constantly held; the truth was at last being preached and listened to. The amount of devoted labour which was willingly and thankfully put forward was simply astonishing. As I look back upon that time, and think of how a host of comparatively unknown men, year after year travelled, worked, and spoke, in the great cause; when I remember individuals who addressed as many as 500 meetings in the five years; and when I see what the result has been, I cannot but feel thankful to have the certain knowledge that the labour was not in vain.

"Nothing is ever as we hope or fear," but already we see now, through those labours inspired by that Leader, a better and happier day has dawned upon Ireland, and she will not now have much longer to wait for the full sunshine of complete success.

Conferences on Home Rule, etc.

The National Liberal Federation took a worthy part in this Herculean task. As the months went by after the return of the Tory Government to office, and as it became ever clearer that, with the introduction of the Home Rule Bill, we had stood indeed at the parting of the ways and our old comrades had left us for ever, Conferences began to be held in many parts of the country, attended by great numbers and supported by all the leaders of the Liberal Party. The object of these conferences was to increase the local interest in political work, to strengthen the Liberal Associations in every district, and to diffuse widely political education, especially on the great question of Home Rule for Ireland. But never at any of these conferences were the other questions of reform, which had been in the front when the Liberal Party were in office, forgotten. On the contrary, they were brought forward in each district as the district itself desired, and were fully and fairly discussed, after being introduced by some speaker who had made the subject a matter of special study. The Conferences were open to everyone, as were the public meetings which generally succeeded them in the evenings. Between November 1886 and October 1887 there were nine of such conferences. The first was held at Leicester when, in addition to the question of Ireland, County organization and the reform of the law of Registration were discussed, the latter being introduced by Mr H. H. Asquith, M.P. The mass meeting in the evening was held in the Floral Hall, the immense building being filled in every part; Earl Spencer was the principal

speaker. He had already done the Home Rule cause immense service by a meeting which he addressed in the Town Hall at Newcastle-upon-Tyne, and at which he made the memorable declaration that, having been brought so closely into contact with affairs in Ireland during the periods in which he had acted as Lord Lieutenant of that country, he had never been able to trace any complicity with crime to any Irish Leader. This now seems an unnecessary statement, but then it was of enormous value, for the Tories, and especially their new allies, were most active in their denunciation of all the Irish Leaders, until you might have supposed that to be a criminal was the first qualification for Parliamentary membership throughout the greater part of Ireland. The programme adopted at the annual meeting at Leeds was enthusiastically approved by the great audience.

The second conference was held at Runcorn, in conjunction with the Northwich division of Cheshire, on 6th December 1886, when Sir Walter Foster took the chair and, in addition to Self-government for Ireland, the Disestablishment of the Church of England in Wales, and the application of the endowments to National public purposes, London Municipal reform, and the settlement of the question of the House of Lords by rendering the members of that body no longer eligible, as Peers, to take part in the legislative affairs of the country, were considered. The principal speaker at the great meeting in the evening was the Marquis of Ripon.

Then followed a meeting on 14th December at Rhyl, attended by representatives from all the Counties and Boroughs of North Wales, and, at this, a Federation of the Liberal Associations of North Wales was formed and was affiliated with the National Liberal Federation. The Right Honourable A. J. Mundella was the principal speaker at the great gathering of Welsh Liberals held in the Rhyl Skating Rink in the evening. The principal

questions which had been discussed were those of the Disestablishment and Disendowment of the Church of England in Wales, and the Land Question in Wales, to which was added in the evening, Intermediate Education, Mr Mundella being assured of the high appreciation of Welshmen of his efforts on behalf of this important matter.

North Wales was followed by South Wales. On the 24th January 1887, a meeting was held at Cardiff, at which it was agreed to federate the Liberal Associations in South Wales and Monmouthshire, and, in addition to the questions which had been discussed at the North Wales Conference, the Conference rejoiced at the appointment of a Committee amongst Welsh Members of Parliament to watch and promote Welsh interests. They called attention to the imperative necessity of giving to the Irish nation power to settle, by its own legislative body, all questions which the Imperial Parliament should decide to come within the category of Irish affairs.

But, by this time, the facts of the widespread evictions of Irish tenants were being made known throughout our country, and, at the magnificent and enthusiastic public meeting held in the evening, the following addition was made to the resolution of the Conference, "That this meeting records its intense indignation at the inhuman conduct of the Irish Landlords who have carried out the barbarous evictions in Kerry, and calls upon the Government to cease rendering assistance to the perpetrators of those atrocities."

Then, on April the 15th, the Liberal Party, from all parts of the County of Cornwall, gathered at Truro. The attendance was so large at the Conference over which Sir Walter Foster, M.P., presided, that an overflow meeting had to be held, and here we find that the Tory Government had taken another step which, perhaps more than anything, tended to arouse the indignation of the majority of the English people, and to strengthen the zeal of the multitude

who were working in the cause of Ireland, not only at the great public conferences presided over by Ministers and Parliament men, but at meetings which were constantly being held throughout the country, both in large towns and in small places, and which were attended by crowds of persons interested in the cause. The first resolutions which were unanimously adopted at the two meetings of the Conference were: "That this meeting indignantly protests against the Coercion Bill of the Government, and regrets that a section of the Liberal Party has seen fit to support a measure so contrary to true Liberal principles," "That this meeting records its determination to support the representatives of the people of Ireland in their constitutional demands for a statutory Parliament for the management of what the Imperial Parliament may decide to be purely Irish domestic affairs." From the first of these resolutions we see that, even yet, there were hopes that the seceders from the Liberal Party might return, and that true Liberal Principles still had some influence upon them. It was natural that this should be so, for it was hard to believe that the men who had once been fighting with us side by side should completely have turned their backs on matters which they had appeared to hold sacred.

COERCION ACT

The Coercion Bill of the Government was an iniquity. Coercion had been tried repeatedly and repeatedly had failed, and the Tory Government and all its supporters, whether they had been Tories from birth or had become Tories by adoption, were, in carrying this measure, sinning against the light.

Its passing through the House of Commons was remarkable on many grounds.

So soon as it was introduced the officers of the Federation convened a special meeting of the Council

to be held in London for the purpose of considering the proposals of the Government for perpetrating so gross an encroachment on the liberties of the Irish people. This meeting was largely attended by delegates from all parts of the country. It was the eighty-seventh measure of coercion which was to be applied to Ireland, but it was really the worst of all, and was animated by a bitterer spirit than the more recent Coercion Acts, at all events, had been. It was aimed, not so much at dealing with unlawful acts, as at suppressing opinions with which the Ministry were not in sympathy. In modern times, at all events, a Minister who is suppressing a public meeting, arresting a Member of Parliament, or by the police dispersing an orderly gathering of unarmed citizens, professes to discharge such a job with reluctance, and only under the pressure of a stern and imperative necessity, but then the Ministers of the Crown threw aside even the pretence of sympathy with the rights of citizens which they were suppressing in Ireland, and they appeared to exult in outraging the traditions of liberty and in trampling upon freedom of speech. The resolutions which were unanimously adopted at this special gathering of the Council were, "That the Council of the National Liberal Federation solemnly protests against the Coercion Bill of the Government as a measure retrograde in policy, tyrannical in principle, and vindictive in detail, as an unjust, unwise, and unwarranted withdrawal from Ireland of the civil rights most dearly cherished by the people of England, and as a disastrous blow to the goodwill, peace, and union, between Ireland and Great Britain."

On the 18th April 1887 the division on the Second Reading was to be taken. On the morning of that day there appeared in the *Times* newspaper a facsimile of a letter which purported to have been written by Mr Parnell, and which was an admission that, whilst he had in public denounced the Phœnix

Park murder of Lord Frederick Cavendish and Mr Burke, he really considered that Burke had got no more than his deserts. The letter was printed, with apparently bloody thumb-marks upon it, and occasioned the wildest excitement throughout the country. The Tories, especially those who had been Liberals, had lost no opportunity of blackening the characters of the Irish Leaders, for they systematically accused them of connivance with all manner of crime, and they now, with peculiar malevolence, went quite wild with delight at that which appeared to them to be an absolute confirmation of the worst of their tale-bearing and detraction. I can never forget how a friend of mine, who was strongly opposed to Irish Home Rule, meeting me in the street waved triumphantly a copy of the letter in my face, and asked me if I would try to justify the Irish Leaders now. As for the idea that there was any mistake in the matter that was scouted as absurd and monstrous. Mr Gladstone was denounced for having made a friend of Mr Parnell, as one who had mixed on terms of intimacy with those whose advocacy of assassination was well-known, and no less a person than Lord Salisbury was the accuser. Mr Parnell had declared in the House of Commons that the letter was a forgery, but his declaration was received with contemptuous laughter by the Tories. The Coercion Bill was hurried forward and forced through the House of Commons by the Government who carried a special resolution for what was then known as the closure by guillotine.

In the country the Bill was stoutly opposed ; great towns meetings were held, called by the Mayors of several Boroughs, and attended by representatives of both parties.

In Newcastle-upon-Tyne, the Town Hall was packed with a vast audience and, after both sides had been heard with as much fairness as is ever possible in a meeting of the kind, an amendment in favour of the Coercion Bill was moved and seconded

by the men who afterwards became for a time Tory Members for Newcastle, and was put to the meeting by a representative of the Mayor who presided, but was lost by a majority of not less than eight to one. It was calculated that the meeting must have consisted of at least 4000 people. It was clearly seen that this Act went further in the direction of unfairness to the National Party in Ireland than any Act which had ever been proposed, because it was to be a permanent Act, and the question as to whether deeds done in Ireland came within the purview of the criminal law or did not was to depend upon the unlimited and unfettered decision of the Irish Minister for the time being. This is not a chance opinion. It was so stated in a judgment of one of the ablest lawyers upon the Irish bench, Chief Baron Palles, in a case which came before him under this very Act. But, as I write with a vivid recollection of that which was going forward at the time, I feel how powerless words are to describe the enthusiasm of the English Home Rulers, and the anger, malice, evil-speaking, and all uncharitableness, of their opponents. Never before, in the lifetime of those of us who were then middle-aged men, had there been anything like the same bitterness introduced into political questions. Families were divided upon every phase of the question; the name of Ireland was tabooed in many circles; it was impossible for old friends to discuss the different aspects of the Coercion Act, or evictions, or any of the other burning aspects of the Irish Question. It was a time of intense and constant excitement.

On the 20th April a very large conference met in the Assembly Room of the Drill Hall at Wolverhampton and was presided over by Sir Walter Foster, and again the Crimes Bill proposed by the Government was denounced as contrary to the principles of freedom and injurious to the real interests of the Nation. Three thousand people at-

tended the evening meeting where the Right Honourable John Morley was the principal speaker. Those who took part were Lord Burton, the Right Honourable Sir H. H. Fowler, M.P., Sir W. Plowden, M.P., and Sir Walter Foster, M.P.

The week after there was another great gathering at Huntingdon of representatives of North and South Hants, West Cambridgeshire, North Northamptonshire, and North Bedfordshire, and, on the 25th May, at Norwich, of the representatives of the Liberal organizations of the City of Norwich and the County of Norfolk, and at both of these meetings the principal matter was the denunciation of the Crimes Act of the Government, both at the conferences and at the evening meetings.

It will not be necessary hereafter to deal at such length with the conferences which were held in different parts of the country. Those which I have described show that the Leaders of the Party and Members of Parliament generally were very ready to assist the work of political education in all directions, and that, especially, the duty of Liberals to organize and to form Associations in every political centre, was strongly preached. The amount of absolute educational spade-work done was simply enormous. The number of people attending the meetings was unprecedented, and, when we add to these gatherings at which great men were present, the meetings which were being held daily in every part of the land, and at which every aspect of the Irish question, historical, religious, and social, was dealt with, it is impossible to exaggerate the value of the knowledge which was conveyed, and the enlightenment of public opinion which was the result of so great a work.

Liberal and Radical Union

During this year another very important step was taken towards improving the Liberal organization in

London and the Home Counties. After careful consideration it was resolved, at a Conference of representatives of the four principal Organizations then working in London, to establish the London Liberal and Radical Union in order to secure and aid in the maintenance of a representative Liberal and Radical association in every Metropolitan constituency, to assist in the registration of voters to promote legislation upon such political questions as specially affected the Metropolis, to advance political education in the Metropolis by lectures and otherwise, and to promote the adoption of Liberal and Radical principles in the Government of the country; and it was resolved to affiliate the Union to the National Liberal Federation.

Following on the establishment of this new organization for the Metropolitan constituencies, the old "London and Counties Liberal Union" was in turn re-constituted as "The Home Counties Division of the National Liberal Federation," charged with the oversight of Berks, Essex, Sussex, Hants, and Herts, with Kent, Middlesex and Surrey (exclusive of London). The object of these was to stimulate more effective Liberal work, especially in the districts where the Liberal representation was in an unsatisfactory condition, and to make the organization of the Liberal Party more thoroughly effective.

But perhaps really the most important work of the year from the point of view of organization and political education was the establishment by the Federation and the Liberal Central Association of the Liberal Publication Department, which has become so famous and, by its splendid services, has made itself of inestimable value to the Liberal Party. From time to time I shall have to point out the remarkable work which this Department has accomplished, but it began immediately with seven publications upon different aspects of the Irish Question, some of them dealing with single points,

such as the right of public meeting, and others treating the whole history of England's dealings with Ireland.

Twelve leaflets on the subject were also issued, and a handbook on Home Rule containing articles by Mr Gladstone, Mr Morley, Lord Thring and others, was edited by Mr James Bryce, M.P., and contained a preface by the Right Honourable Earl Spencer. This was an important work containing nearly 300 pages, and an invaluable handbook for all who desired to master the question. In addition to these a list of not less than fifty-four lecturers upon the subject was circulated, the greater part of the lecturers devoting their services to this important work without any payment.

It was indeed an unprecedented thing that, for more than five years, a great popular agitation of this kind should have gone forward increasing in intensity. Ireland has had to suffer much at the hands of England, but she never should forget and never will forget how great numbers of Englishmen, feeling keenly the shame of their country's past conduct, gave up really years of labour, and went to great personal cost, to fight strenuously in a cause which had commended itself to their hearts and consciences.

Annual Meeting, Nottingham

This remarkable year of the Federation's history, 1887, was concluded by an annual meeting at Nottingham which in itself, on many accounts, was of quite peculiar interest. The report which was then presented ended with a strong appeal for freedom, justice, and peace, in the relations between Great Britain and Ireland; and it went on to say "That great work accomplished, the way will be cleared for legislation upon the Land Question in all its aspects, Local Government in London and the Counties, the development of elementary and

technical Education, Local option, Religious equality, the improvement of the laws relating to the representation of the people, and other pressing reforms ripe for settlement, and loudly called for in the interests of the people of the United Kingdom." But Ireland was the one subject which, by common consent, was placed in the forefront of the battle. At the first meeting of the Council, after certain alterations of rules were considered, the following Home Rule resolution was moved by Mr Asquith, in a speech of splendid power which came as a revelation to the great majority of the delegates, and it was seconded by Mr Acland. The resolution ran, "That this Council rejoices to know that the policy of conciliating the people of Ireland by granting them a legislative body for the management of what Parliament shall decide to be distinctively Irish affairs, which was urged upon the country by the representatives assembled at the Leeds meeting of the Federation last year, has since that time grown steadily and rapidly in the favour of the English public, and it looks forward with confidence to the early settlement of the Irish Question on the principles set forth by Mr Gladstone and under his direction." This was followed by a resolution, "That this Council strongly condemns the enactment of a permanent Coercion law for Ireland for which there was no justification in the actual state of the country, and which deprives Irishmen of constitutional rights long enjoyed and most dearly prized by their fellow citizens in Great Britain. The Council further records its emphatic protest against the action of the Government in leaving the people over a great part of Ireland at the mercy of indiscriminate and undirected force, and in recklessly attempting to bring back into practice the old tyrannical Tory principles in respect of the rights of public meeting, free speech, a free press, and free combination."

This was moved by Mr E. Robertson, M.P., and

seconded by Mr Osler, and it was then supported with remarkable power and effect by the Right Honourable Sir William Harcourt, M.P., and the Right Honourable John Morley, M.P. After it had been carried, Mr Gladstone made the first of those superb speeches in the cause of freedom and fair-play for Ireland by which he astonished and charmed the political world, with the uncertain exception of the British Tory Party, and which speeches gave special interest to the annual meetings of the Federation (with only one exception) which were held until he had carried his great measure of Home Rule triumphantly through the House of Commons.

No one who was present will ever forget that speech. The late October day was far advanced when our noble Leader came into the Hall. He was seventy-eight years of age, but his delivery had the force and the vitality of youth. He spoke for more than an hour, dealing with the Irish administration, the policy of coercion as an alternative to Home Rule, the lesson of Mitchelstown, and the duty of the Liberal Party. The only sign of increasing years was when he came to read printed extracts describing certain events in the actual history of coercion. As he found some difficulty in doing this, a candle was lighted for him. I remember it was contained in an ordinary bedroom candlestick, and, in his intense earnestness, with the paper he was reading in his left hand and the candlestick in his right, he constantly forgot altogether what would necessarily happen, and the candlestick was time after time thrown upwards and backwards, to the great detriment of his handsome coat. I remember an eminent Tory Member of Parliament once, in discussing our great Leader, found fault with him because he said that he was never in earnest. I told him the story which I have just related, and he was convinced that he must never again make a statement of that kind.

Mr Gladstone was much impressed by the gathering of delegates. In opening he said, "Although

my experience of public meetings has not been small, I am not aware that I have ever addressed an assembly corresponding in some of its most important features with this assembly, for here I see before me a body of between 2000 and 3000 gentlemen, not inhabitants of the great town within whose precincts we are gathered, but drawn from all parts of the country, Scotland included. This is an extraordinary assembly because I think it pretty plain that the ordinary strength of political movement, the ordinary interest of political controversy, would in vain be appealed to to induce such a number of selected citizens from, I may say, nearly all the great political centres in the kingdom, to take the pains and to submit to the inconvenience of repairing to a particular spot for the sake of conference upon and for the consideration of the great political controversy of the day. But I must say that the pains you have been willing to take have been warranted, and are called for by the state of public affairs, since the occasion upon which we meet and the circumstances of the time are quite as extraordinary as is this assembly." This is not the right place to give a full account of this speech, but I must content myself with saying that, as a thorough survey of the then mode of governing Ireland in all its details, it is difficult to conceive anything which could have a wider grasp, more perfect knowledge, and clearer utterance; it was a splendid effort.

But, grand as it was, our Great Leader far surpassed it at the vast public gathering of the following night, when the Skating Rink was crammed with an audience of some 6000 people which he wrought up to a pitch of enthusiasm which, in my experience, has never been surpassed; I doubt whether it has ever been equalled.

He began by dwelling upon some of the questions in the first rank of legislative urgency, Parliamentary Registration, one man one vote, the Reform of the Land Laws, the interests of agriculture, including

those of the landlord, the farmer and the labourer; he denounced that "Phantasm of protection which is now sometimes evoked from the shades of darkness in order if possible to make some dupes and fools among the people." He advocated Local Government, decentralization, the reform of the Liquor Laws, and discussed the question of Disestablishment in Scotland and Wales, and whether the two questions were ripe for solution, pointing out that nearly the whole of the Welsh Members were in favour of Disestablishment, but that, in Scotland, although there was a majority of Members in favour, it was not a very commanding one. He then had a few sympathetic words to say about the case of the Highland Crofters, and after this he turned to the Irish Question and dealt with it as no other man has ever done. He did not shirk difficulties, he refused to state the precise manner in which all the principal enactments in a future Bill for the government of Ireland should be framed. With regard to many important subjects which he said had created great difference of opinion, he for his part would not allow any proposals he had been party to making, or any opinions to which he might personally lean, to become impediments in the way of the settlement of the great question, provided that settlement complied with the conditions originally laid down, provided that it was not a fraud upon the people, provided that it had the acceptance of Ireland. He pointed out that there must in any event remain with the British Parliament the ultimate power to arrest injustice; he refused to bind himself to the proposition which had been urged upon him that Ulster or part of Ulster should be absolutely excluded from any Irish arrangement, and he went on to speak of the coming winter, of coercion, which used to be intended to meet Irish crime, and which still made the pretence for it, as though Ireland was an utterly criminal country, whereas Ireland was a country singularly free from crime, and more free be it remembered than

the island of Great Britain; he advised the Irishmen to shun outrage as they would shun poison, and he went carefully into the question as between the Irish tenant and the Irish landlord. He pointed out the danger of the situation aggravated by the violent methods of the Government and by their fresh doses of coercion. How thrilling was the peroration to this great utterance, and how splendidly delivered: "Gentlemen, we have stood by one another in darkness and in storm, and it is not likely that we are going to flinch or to flag now when the morning has dawned upon us, and when we see that the sun is mounting in the sky. Our faith in our cause, gentlemen, is strong as our faith in justice itself, and our conviction is that this great nation, so grounded as it is and so trained as it is in the principles of political truth and honour, will and will promptly carry to a triumphant issue one of the noblest causes that ever wakened up the energies of man or ever asked and won the favour of the Most High." Little wonder when, after speaking for an hour and a half, Mr Gladstone resumed his seat, the whole audience rose and for many minutes the great building was filled with a perfect thunder of applause.

The great nation of which he spoke has been led far astray by the cunning and wiles of the Tory Party, invigorated as it was by its absorption of dubious radical but blind imperial elements. For a time the old Tory dodge of turning men's attention from home affairs by many wars has been singularly successful, and the people have been demoralised past belief, and all good and great questions have been cast back to make way for the great imperial duty of trampling upon nationalities and destroying the freedom and independence of white and coloured peoples alike. But there are signs that the hideous disease of the body politic is working itself out to cure, and that honour and justice will once more be heard and given the foremost place.[1]

[1] The General Election of 1906 has fulfilled these signs.

The year which followed the Nottingham meeting was one during which the Federation had much work to do. The resolutions passed at Nottingham formed the staple material for exposition and criticism for many months, and the meeting left an indelible mark upon the politics of the day. In the last two months of this year 1887, which corresponded with the two first months of the Federation year, there were great Conferences in Lancaster, in Penrith, and in Gloucester. At one of these alone there were 970 delegates present. In each case there was a magnificent evening demonstration addressed by the Right Honourable Sir William Harcourt, M.P., and resolutions condemning the Coercion Act, protesting against the reckless attacks of the Government upon freedom and endorsing Mr Gladstone's Irish policy, and welcoming and accepting the resolutions of the Nottingham Conference were passed with enthusiasm. Indeed, in addition to conferences and demonstrations, innumerable meetings were being held in all parts of the country. For these the Federation was frequently able to arrange speakers, but the demand exceeded the supply, and complaints were made by certain Associations that they were overlooked. This must always be the case. The Federation Committee pointed out, in the first place, that frequently two or three, or even four, Members of Parliament found themselves upon the same platform. Such an arrangement was unfair to the speaker, unjust to the Party, and involved a great waste of force. It is natural that every small Association should desire to have a great bill announcing that three or four gentlemen from a distance, all of them well known, and any one of them well able to hold and edify a meeting by himself, will attend upon a certain day, but it is indeed a real waste of force, and this is not quite uncommon even in the present day. The fact of the matter is, when any question is forward, audiences seem to like to be talked to, and they are even willing to sit a

most unconscionable length of time, and to listen to arguments which, perforce, must be repeated under the circumstances over and over again.

Then the Committee pointed out that the habit of depending to a large extent upon members of Parliament for meetings was largely increasing, and was a very doubtful benefit to the Party generally. In former times we never thought of asking a Member of Parliament or any other gentleman from a distance, unless the circumstances were very exceptional. We held great meetings, attended frequently by from 2000 to 3000 people, which were addressed entirely by local talent. The people came to them because they were interested in the subjects of the meeting, and were satisfied that the local speakers would treat those subjects adequately. This was wholesome, it fostered self-reliance and developed local talent. It is something of a sign of degeneracy in political life when external help is all but invariably looked for. Such help may educate but it will not create life in a party; that must develop from within. The truest sign of political vigour is when an Association is sustained by its own exertions, and carries on its work and gives expression to its opinions by and through its local leaders.

Local Government

The principal measure which the Government took up this year was that of Local Government, and, at the Annual meeting of the General Committee for the Election of Officers, held at the National Liberal Club in London on the 11th April 1888, this measure was fully discussed. A series of amendments which were felt to be necessary to make the Bill really of great value were suggested by the meeting, but, except that the Licensing clauses which ignored the right of direct control by the inhabitants and created a vested interest not recognized by law were omitted,

none of the important points proposed were dealt with in the Bill. Even the Licensing clauses have been practically restored by a subsequent Tory Government. The Bill was forced through the House of Commons in an imperfect and incomplete condition, and yet by it a great step was taken, for it placed County Government upon a representative basis. The Act itself was little more than a sketch to be filled in when Liberals once more attained power.

The General Committee met again on 1st August 1888 to consider the administration of the Crimes Act which, when it was passed nearly a year previously, was declared to be directed solely against crime, and it was then also promised that every security would be given for testing the legality of proceedings taken under it: both declarations proved to be false.

The severe powers of the Act were chiefly used, not against crime at all, but against combinations of the cultivators of the soil, which in Great Britain would have been perfectly legitimate. The Resident Magistrates were absolutely unfitted to sit upon such cases. I myself attended the hearing of the first case in Galway and was astounded to find that the Crown did not attempt, in fact it seemed to consider it unnecessary, to prove the offences against the persons who were alleged to have committed them, and they were found guilty and sentenced to periods of imprisonment for other offences than those for which they were tried.

When indeed, in spite of the strenuous efforts of the Crown, prisoners did succeed in forcing their way into the High Court, that Court passed grave censure on the Resident Magistrates, and it took no pains to hide its extreme contempt for their judicial capabilities. Chief Baron Palles expressly declared, against the constant assertions of the Government to the contrary, that the Coercion Act created new offences, and, in other words, that it was in the power

of the Lord Lieutenant to make certain acts criminal at his own will and pleasure. It was a strange time to live in. There can be little doubt that there was bitter hatred between the landlords and the tenants in Ireland. It was difficult to get Englishmen to understand how this came about. On the part of the landlords it was simply the question of not getting their money, the difficulty of enforcing payment of their rents, but those rents were, in the vast majority of cases, not interest upon what the land had cost the landlord, not interest upon the landlord's capital, but interest upon the improvements which the tenants had themselves made in the land, more interest being demanded whenever the tenants put more capital, in the form of labour and improvement, into the land. It was perhaps a case without parallel in the civilised world, and the real marvel was that any people could stand the iniquitous proceedings on the part of the landlords which the Government counselled and supported, with the patience and forbearance that the Irish people did. It was time that energetic protests should be made, for all true Liberals viewed so odious a system of government with condemnation and disgust. In the words of the Motion submitted to the House of Commons by Mr John Morley on 27th June 1888, "The system undermines respect for law, estranges the affections of the people of Ireland, and is deeply injurious to the common interests of the United Kingdom." The officers of the Federation, as the result of this meeting of the General Committee, issued a circular to the Federated Associations setting out the facts, and strongly advising that efforts to protest against the policy of the Government should be continued, and that no means should be left untried to arouse the public conscience to the iniquities of the system for which, through their Government, the English people were responsible.

TIMES CHARGES AGAINST IRISH LEADERS

The Committee also considered the position which the charges against Mr Parnell and the other Irish Leaders had at this time assumed. The Government having refused to submit the charges to Select Committees of the House of Commons, as had been the usage in the case of all charges affecting the honour of its Members, had introduced a Bill which they carried by the "guillotine," and which committed the enquiry to three Judges of the Supreme Court, but the enquiry was not to be one into certain clear and specific charges against certain Members of Parliament who were named, but was to be an investigation into the connection of the National and Land Leagues with agrarian crime. By making the net so wide it was seen that any fact which showed that anyone of the thousand members of either League had behaved criminally would be held to show criminality in the whole body, and particularly in their Leaders.

It must not be forgotten that the Government and their supporters had so fully made up their minds as to the guilt of Mr Parnell and the Irish Leaders generally that they condescended in this matter of what is known as "the Parnell Commission" to a very dirty trick. When they introduced the Bill they made it appear that it was an offer to Mr Parnell and his friends, and that it was to take effect if Mr Parnell accepted and approved of it, and if it were generally acceptable to the House; otherwise it would be withdrawn. Mr Parnell gave no acceptance or approval of the plan as it stood. The whole Opposition resisted the plan, and then it was made clear that the Government had resolved in any event upon the altogether exceptional mode of procedure which the Bill contemplated, and they forced it through the House of Commons in spite of intense opposition, and entirely ignoring the understanding

with which they themselves avowed that they introduced it. The Commission sat on 17th September 1888, and rose finally on 22nd November 1889, having examined 450 witnesses, and the shorthand note of the Proceedings filling eleven folio volumes of between 7000 and 8000 pages. It was a weary business, but the weariness was relieved by certain dramatic touches. The most dramatic of these was when the Manager of the *Times* newspaper told the amazing story of how he had become possessed of the letters which purported to have been written by Mr Parnell, and which he had accepted really without investigation, being persuaded that they were genuine letters because he felt that they were the sort of letters that Mr Parnell would be likely to write! Although he paid £2500 altogether for the letter which he printed on the day of the Division on the Coercion Bill and letters subsequently received, he had not asked any questions whence these letters came. It was a pity that the *Times* people were not allowed to call the experts by whom they proposed to prove that the letters were genuine. They had to call the man who had supplied them. He was cross-examined by Sir Charles (afterwards Lord) Russell. Calmly but relentlessly, searching questions were put to him with infinite skill, and, at the end of two days' cross-examination, he had to confess that he had himself forged the letters, and then he managed to escape to Madrid, and nine days afterwards he had the grace to shoot himself. In spite of this, good Tories who had been Liberals refused to believe that the letters had been forged at all!

I have gone forward into the year 1889 in order to complete this brief story of the Parnell Commission. Now to return to the year 1887-1888.

The Liberal Publication Department had fairly begun its career of remarkable usefulness. Upwards of 10,000 copies of the Handbook on Home Rule had been sold, and a large number of pamphlets and leaflets upon every phase of the measures pro-

posed by the Tory Government had been dealt with by them.

ANNUAL MEETING, BIRMINGHAM

As the annual meeting of 1888 was to be held in Birmingham, the Report treated at some length of the effect of the removal of the head-quarters of the Federation from that city to London. It spoke of the cordial character of the relations of the Federation to the Leaders of the Party, and of the profound and unshaken loyalty of the Party to its great Chief, and the confidence felt in his colleagues, but it stated, "At the same time the Federation has never been, and, if it is consistent with the principles upon which it was established, can never become a merely official organization. It receives its inspiration from the people, one of its chief functions is to ascertain the will of the Party, to give expression to that will, and to unite all, Leaders as well as followers, in securing the objects which the Party desires."

Now, for the first time, are divisions in the Liberal ranks with regard to the question of labour representation mentioned. I shall subsequently have to treat upon this matter rather more fully. Here I need only mention that the Report, in acknowledging the excellence of the workmen Members of the House of Commons, says, "It is frequently asserted as a reason for starting a Labour Candidate that the Liberal organization of the constituency is not thoroughly representative. This charge can rarely be sustained, but it is of the highest importance that the officers of Liberal Associations should take care to make their Association so thoroughly representative as to give no ground for such a complaint. When, however, assured of the thoroughly representative character of their Association, it is equally important whenever and wherever the demand arises for a Labour

Candidate, that those making the demand should be treated with the utmost frankness, generosity and courtesy. The difficulties attending the question of Labour representation are very great. They do not, however, arise from the members of the Party, who would gladly welcome more Labour Members to the House of Commons, nor from those responsible for the organization of the Party, who are prepared to use such legitimate influence as they possess to assist the cause; the great obstacle arises from the fact that working men themselves are greatly divided in opinion upon the subject. Until the Leaders of the Labour Party have overcome this difficulty it is obvious that the success of their cause cannot be assured. Your Committee trust that, wherever a difference arises, it may be conducted with mutual forbearance, so that the Liberal cause, the success of which the genuine advocates of Labour representation have at heart equally with the members of Liberal organizations, may not be imperilled."

The Report also notices how the claim of those members of the House of Commons who had once been called dissentient Liberals that they were Liberals still, was fading away. As a Party they gave no Liberal votes, and the majority of them were frequently more Tory than the Tories in the questions which from time to time arose. Although many of them by their votes in previous Parliaments had supported the equalization of the Death Duties, when this proposal was made by Mr Gladstone, they voted against it. In fact, Lord Hartington put it simply that, so long as the Party to which they were opposed was pledged to those principles which inspired the Bills of 1886, so long as they refused to tell the Unionists how far they adhered to those principles, or how far they were prepared to abandon them, there was nothing which Liberals could place before the country which would induce the so-called Liberal-Unionists to assist them to

return to power! Measures, in short, were not to be dealt with upon their merits, but solely as they affected the position of the Government then in office. It is not uninteresting to see that already the Committee was anxious to bring the great question of the day to the test of a General Election. "Unfortunately," they say, "the legal limit of the life of a Parliament enables a Parliamentary majority to maintain a Government in power although it may have ceased to represent the majority of the people." If that required to be said at the end of 1888 when the Government had had two years of power, what can we say in approaching the end of 1905 when they are in their sixth year of power, and the evidences of general dissatisfaction with them are so patent as to be acknowledged even by themselves.

There was something of special interest in holding the Annual meeting of the Federation in its original home which had become the stronghold of the enemy of the Liberals. The gathering was worthy of the occasion and the meetings were strikingly successful. In point of representation and attendance it was the most successful of the Annual meetings which had been held; "As a political demonstration representing the united strength of the Liberal Associations it practically covered the entire area of England and Wales; it was without a parallel in the history of the Liberal Party or of any similar organization. As a gathering of a Party which its opponents delighted to describe as shattered and disunited, it was an astonishing success, and showed beyond question that that Party had never been more enthusiastic and determined, and that, in fact, the Liberal Party, as was stated at one of the Council Meetings, was still 'eager and united, better and stronger for its recent purge.'"

Prior to the actual business of the Federated Associations, a meeting was held in the Town Hall on the 5th November at which an Address was

presented to Mr Gladstone by the Birmingham Liberal Association. Extraordinary enthusiasm greeted the appearance of Mr and Mrs Gladstone, the great hall being crowded in every part and presenting an appearance of excitement and animation never excelled in a place so celebrated for memorable and eventful meetings. In replying to the spirited address presented by Mr Osler, the President of the Birmingham Liberal Association, Mr Gladstone recalled in his happiest manner the circumstances of his visit eleven years before when he attended the inaugural meetings of the Federation. After a graceful reference to local municipal affairs, he turned to politics and compared the circumstances of 1877 and 1888. On the former occasion the Liberal Party was reproached with placing its honour and its interests at the command of a foreign and hostile power, while now they were reproached with separating the different portions of the Empire. Upon the first of those big and bold accusations, he said the country had pronounced its judgment in 1880, and he expressed his confidence that, when it had another opportunity of speaking, the one accusation would be found to be worth just as much as the other. After dealing with the Irish Question at length, he reviewed the Session of 1888, and, coming to the subjects ripe for discussion, he spoke of one man one vote. He showed conclusively how in 1886 the Liberals were beaten, not by a majority of voters, but of votes, and, analysing the results of the Bye-elections, he expressed his belief that, notwithstanding the power of the plural voter, an early Dissolution would mean a Liberal majority.

The Sessions of the Councils were extraordinary for the multitude of delegates from every part of the country as well as for the number of Members of Parliament and Peers attending. Of Members of Parliament there were over one hundred, and they included Mr Morley, Mr Fowler, Mr Childers, Sir William Harcourt, Sir George Trevelyan, Mr

Campbell Bannerman, Mr Osborne Morgan and Mr Mundella, whilst among the Peers taking part in the meetings were Lord Ripon, Lord Spencer, Lord Rosebery, Lord Kimberley, Lord Aberdeen, Lord Brassey, and Lord Herschell.

At the first meeting Mr John Morley made a remarkable speech which excited much enthusiasm. Part of this deserves specially to be remembered as setting forth the high ideal of politics which has always distinguished that Leader, and which ought to be the ideal of every Liberal. "I confess that, for my own part, I should feel very ill-rewarded for the dreary hours that we pass in the House of Commons, for the great fatigue and harassment that one undergoes in addressing great audiences in all parts of the kingdom, if I did not think that all this labour and effort, continued as it will have to be perhaps for many years, not merely on the Irish Question but on others, would have no result but mere Party triumph. What we have to do is to get as soon as we can to those questions which affect the daily life of our people. Dominions, thrones, principalities, and powers, I care little for them, except so far as they are instrumental in making more men happier, and happier in a better way. Most of us here care, I think, only for politics as they directly or indirectly, remotely or immediately, lead to more light, more comfort, being shed into the cottage and the home. We want to get, whether in this land or in Ireland, or in our widespread realm all over the surface of the globe, we want to make the home, however humble it may be, better and brighter. If we are animated by that spirit, if we walk with prudence, depend upon it, that, when the time comes, whether we live to be old or are cut off early, we shall at least lay down our work with the satisfaction of knowing, the great among us and the small among us, that we have not borne it in vain."

Mr (now Sir) H. H. Fowler, M.P., spoke to the Irish resolution at the same Session and he put the position

of matters with his accustomed clearness and eloquence. "There were three points from which they never had receded, never would recede, and as to which they had been misunderstood, he wished he could not add misrepresented; they held unflinchingly to the unity of the Empire, to the unimpaired supremacy, the unquestioned and unquestionable supremacy of Parliament. They held the right, the duty, the wisdom, the necessity, of entrusting to the Irish Representatives elected by the Irish people the legislation for and the administration of those Irish affairs which Parliament should declare to be exclusively Irish. . . . The resolution said that the only alternative to the Liberal Policy was coercion. They said that at Leeds two years ago; it was prophecy; they said it now; it was history."

At the next Session, Sir George Trevelyan was one of the principal speakers and dealt with questions relating to the Reform of Electoral Law, and in doing so spoke of "our being in a minority in Parliament, and we do not know how long it will be before a General Election enables us to show that we are in a majority in the country, but, whether the time be long or short, we know it will not be wasted because, during that time, we are remaking the Liberal Party. Many people have left us both in Parliament and in the constituencies who were by their opportunities of leisure and by their social position prominent men amongst us. We have lost some with regret, others are best away, but the process, though a painful one, has been a wholesome one, for the result is that the people are thrown on their own resources, and are learning to fight their own battle, and the battle of the people will never be won until the people fight it for themselves. They are fighting it under enormous disadvantages, for the electoral system practically swarms with abuses, not one of which can be defended in reason or justice, and every one of which tells against the popular Party."

There was a thrilling scene during Sir George

Trevelyan's splendid speech. When Lord Spencer entered the room the meeting rose to give him a magnificent reception. Sir George Trevelyan, with happy readiness, pointed to the former Lord Lieutenant of Ireland and said: "There he is: I have stood by his side beyond the seas in other times, and I am glad to think that we have never done anything the thought of which can dismay us as we stand side by side on such a platform as this." It is not often that any conference has been brightened by so dramatic an episode.

Mr Mundella proposed a resolution demanding the provision of technical education, and that all elementary schools should be free, and Sir William Harcourt, in a brief but powerful speech, raised the meeting to high enthusiasm; every sentence either awakened peals of laughter or evoked enthusiastic cheers. It is difficult to quote from his speech, but there are one or two of his sentences which I must give: "I did not come here to make a speech, I came here to listen to speeches. I am sure you are satiated with speeches. Speech is an article of which, at Birmingham at this moment, I think it may safely be said that the supply is equal to the demand. Most of my speaking is done to a different audience from this, I generally go to convert the heathen, I am not sure that I have the gift of speaking to the converted, but there arises in such a spectacle as this something of the feeling which an old soldier experiences when, on the morning of the day of battle, the battalions deploy in their bold array and are waiting for the conflict which is coming. There is a feeling of comradeship with those who are gathering from every part of the United Kingdom to declare their sympathy and loyalty to the Liberal cause. We know the circumstances, and we regret them, under which the Federation left Birmingham, but it has come back to Birmingham like some adventurous spirit who has gone to seek his fortunes elsewhere, and who returns to the home of his youth with augmented

fortunes and wider fame. It is well for us to be here."

Again: "The taunt is levelled every day against our illustrious Chief that Mr Gladstone is a tyrant who imposes his will and his policy upon unwilling followers. Is that the history of the Federation? Oh, no! It was not Mr Gladstone who endeavoured to impose a policy upon the Federation which it was unwilling to accept. I should like to see any man dictating, to a body like that which I see before me, a policy which their judgment and conscience repudiated. It is said that we are all the victims of the wire-pullers, but the wire-pullers in this case are on the other side, and they pulled the wires to very little advantage because they could not make the puppets of the Federation dance to their music."

On the afternoon of the second day, the Women's Liberal Association held a crowded public meeting in the Town Hall over which Mrs Gladstone presided, and an Address was presented to her on behalf of the Birmingham and Midland women.

On the morning of that day the Birmingham ladies had presented her with an Address and with a cameo portrait cut from a very fine onyx in high relief, and being a bold and striking likeness of her great husband.

I have mentioned these different meetings in order that, when it is remembered that every one of them was crowded, every one of them was enthusiastic, in every case the audiences sat through the whole of the proceedings, and there was none of that passing to and fro which is usually the case at most conferences, some idea may be obtained of the quite extraordinary nature of the Annual meeting held at Birmingham. It was fitly closed by a huge gathering of more than 18,000 people at Bingley Hall, which was addressed by our great Leader in a splendid speech which delighted his audience with specimens of nearly every varying phase of his wonderful oratory, and which culminated in a peroration of extraordinary power.

Then came what Sir William Harcourt called "an unexampled scene," when Mr Gladstone, after speaking an hour and fifty minutes, had completed his peroration. No one who witnessed it will ever forget it. Mr Morley spoke of it as "the extraordinary and unexampled demonstration which you have just made, after one of the most powerful, the most argumentative, and the most eloquent speeches ever made on behalf of one of the noblest of human causes." It seemed as if the vast multitude could never discharge their hearts of the emotions which stirred them, for they cheered in a hurricane of hurrahs, broke into song, cheered again tempestuously, again joined in a chorus of praise, and once more in storms of applause, until nine minutes had flown, and the chairman obtained a hearing for the subsequent speakers who, wisely, had but little to say, but said it admirably well.

In his splendid Life of Mr Gladstone Mr Morley tells how, before the meeting, he was entirely disengaged in mind, during dinner ate and drank his usual quantity, and talked at his best about all manner of things until the time came when they must go to the meeting. "He was perfectly silent in the carriage, as I remembered Bright had been when years before I drove with him to the same Hall. The sight of the vast meeting was almost appalling—from 15,000 to 17,000 people. He spoke with great vigour and freedom, the fine passages probably heard all over, many other passages certainly not heard, but his gesture was so strong and varied as to be almost as interesting as the words would have been. The speech lasted an hour and fifty minutes, and he was not at all exhausted when he sat down. The scene at the close was absolutely indescribable; overwhelming like the sea."

Even now we have not exhausted the meetings held in connection with the Annual meeting at Birmingham. Mr Gladstone received a deputation representing the Irishmen of Birmingham and district

who presented him with an address, in reply to which he spoke to them on "Lessons from Irish History," concluding with the memorable words: "The residue of my life is the property of Ireland as far as it may be made of use for the attainment of the great object which we have in view."

He was also waited upon by a deputation from the Walsall Liberal Association, and the Artizans of Birmingham presented him with specimens of Birmingham industry, including a handsome shield representative of the button, military ornament, electro-plate and enamelling trades, a beautiful crystal glass bowl, a richly wrought brass inkstand, decorated brass fire-irons, valuable specimens of pens, pen-boxes, pen-holders, etc., and an elaborately ornamented dinner bowl. In acknowledging the gifts, Mr Gladstone addressed to the large gathering of Birmingham artizans a long speech upon railway rates, technical education, fair trade, and the direct representation of labour, and he concluded with some remarks on the connection between industry and art as a means of elevating the character and habits of the people, and effectively increasing their material prosperity.

It is simply amazing to remember that, at the time that our great Leader went through the fatigue and excitement of those Birmingham meetings, he was no less than seventy-nine years of age.

In the year which followed the Birmingham meeting the Home Rule agitation made remarkable progress. The whole country rose in indignation at the violent and brutal way in which the Coercion Act was administered, and conferences and public meetings were held in London and throughout the country at which strong and even angry protests were made.

Administration of Crimes Act

On the 6th February 1889 a special meeting of the Council of the Federation was held at the National

Liberal Club to consider the administration of the Crimes Act in Ireland with special reference to the imprisonment of Mr William O'Brien and other Irish Members of Parliament.

A conference was also held in the Memorial Hall, Farringdon Street. It was a great gathering, full of earnestness and enthusiasm, and the speeches constituted a tremendous indictment of the Government. "There is scarcely one act which two years ago was thought impossible of any Government, but was done to-day and done gladly by Her Majesty's Ministers. Where is now their new Morality? Where their monopoly of the Ten Commandments? They had got some new readings, 'Thou shalt not steal unless thou art an Irish landlord; Thou shalt not kill, unless thou art a member of the Royal Irish Constabulary.' Latest of all came this new reading, 'Thou shalt not bear false witness against thy neighbour unless thou art an instrument of the *Times* newspaper or a member of Her Majesty's Government.'" No marvel that the conduct of Her Majesty's Ministers aroused such strong indignation. It was dragging the good name and fame of England in the mire before the face of the civilised world, and it was high time that all who loved their country should protest.

This conference was followed in the evening by a crowded meeting at St. James's Hall, over which Mr John Morley presided. Mr Parnell addressed the gathering, his reception being an extraordinary demonstration, a perfect whirlwind of enthusiasm, as the *Daily News* said, in telling the story of the entry of the Chairman and Mr Parnell, "The scene was tempestuously hearty. The audience rose like the waves, and white handkerchiefs flew like the foam off them. Those whirling fabrics filled the air with a rushing wind, and the sound was supplied by the roar of thousands of voices. But there the comparison stops. Such cheering sounds were never heard in tempest, nor was their thrill the thrill of awe. Many faces glowed with pleasure. Only one was

unmoved. Mr Parnell, the imperturbable, preserved his wonted and marvellous self-control throughout the long drawn-out reception. Through the evening, too, even amid more marvellous demonstrations, he preserved his customary calm, at least when it was to himself that allusions were made. When, however, the audience insisted on paying honour to his Counsel the grave face was illuminated by a grateful smile."

The heather was now fairly alight through the country. Conferences were held at Ely, Portsmouth, Reigate, Epping, Rochester, Newport, Reading, and Stratford. Great public meetings were constant, and, in the summer, Mr Gladstone made an important tour in the West of England, which was a demonstration of magnitude and importance. He successively visited Romsey, Weymouth, Dartmouth, Torquay, Falmouth, Redruth, Truro, St Austel, Bodmin, Launceston, Tavistock, and Plymouth, and at this last named place his greatest meeting was held. It was presided over by the veteran leader of Devonshire Liberalism, the Right Honourable Sir Thomas Acland, and was one of the most striking which Mr Gladstone ever attended. After Plymouth he spoke at Poole and at Wimborne, and returned to London, having undeniably brought about "the awakening of the West." In the Report presented at the Manchester meeting in 1889, it is stated that the arrangements for this tour were conceived and admirably carried out, in conjunction with the local Associations, by Mr (now Sir Robert) Hudson, the Assistant Secretary of the Federation to whom the Committee felt that special acknowledgment and thanks were due.

Annual General Committee, Nottingham

The Annual meeting of the General Committee was held in June at Nottingham, and it is interesting to note that the first of the resolutions carried, and afterwards forwarded through the French Ambassa-

dor to President Carnot, was that the following Address be adopted and forwarded to the President of the French Republic:—"On behalf of the National Liberal Federation we desire to tender to your Excellency, and to the French people, our hearty congratulations upon the occasion of the Centenary which France as a Nation is now celebrating. In common with all who profess the desire for the promotion of national and individual liberty, the Liberals of England feel profoundly conscious of the magnitude of the services which have been rendered to the cause of freedom throughout the world by the great men who were the founders of modern France; earnestly trusting that in the future, as in the past one hundred years, the French people may be found in the van of the march of liberty. We desire to give expression to our own warm sympathy with the Republic, and with all who live under its flag. We specially desire to offer our congratulations upon the manner in which France is celebrating the Centenary of the Revolution, and we earnestly trust that the great festival of Peace, of which Paris is now the centre, may lead the way to a long series of triumphs in which the French people, vying with the other Nations of the world, may gloriously uphold the renown and the honour of their great country."

It is interesting also to find that it was unanimously resolved, "That the meeting protests strongly against the conduct of the Government in refusing to state their intentions with regard to the Sugar Bounties Convention Bill, and warns the Liberal organizations throughout the country to exercise their utmost vigilance so as to thwart any insidious attempt to rush through the House of Commons a measure which has been already condemned by the almost unanimous voice of the country." But the Tories learn nothing. At the time that I write this, another Sugar Convention has been entered into with disastrous consequences to this country. In the first twelve months during

which it was in operation our consumption of sugar decreased by 50,713 tons because of the considerable increase in price, whilst in France the consumption increased by 327,911 tons, and in Germany by 386,239 tons, and their price has been greatly reduced. Mr Joseph Chamberlain is entirely responsible for this business. He did it ostensibly with the desire of helping our West Indian Colonies, and no doubt they have slightly benefited, but it has been at the cost of this country, and employment has been lessened and our working classes have had to pay higher prices for one of the most important articles of food. The great Tory Imperialist party in fact have made a present of eight millions a year to France and Germany, and got nothing in return. This is an object lesson which cannot be overlooked. The Tories, led by Mr Chamberlain, were full of the great deed that they were doing in this matter of sugar, and the disastrous result surely must be borne in mind by every citizen of our Empire when they hear the sweet voice of the Tory pleading with them to accept that doctrine of protection which really lies at the root of the whole matter. If these Tory prophets failed so egregiously in the one experiment which they were allowed to carry out, what would happen to our poor country if they got their own way in other matters.

During this year the Home Counties division of the Federation, in order to provide a course of political instruction in the darkest and most unenlightened quarters of Toryism, started the Liberal Van which traversed Hampshire, Sussex, Kent, Essex, Hertfordshire, and Surrey, public meetings being held in most of the places which it visited, and large quantities of literature being distributed.

Annual Meeting, Manchester

The Annual meeting of the Council was held at Manchester in December 1889.

I think it well to point out here that the custom of passing many resolutions embodying the principal articles of the creed of the great majority of Liberals had already begun. At the Nottingham meeting in 1887 this was the case, and the same plan was followed at the meeting in Birmingham, but, in the Report which was presented to that meeting, attention was called to the fact that no formal political programme was submitted by the National Liberal Federation for general acceptance, but the opinions of Liberals on current questions was, as occasion might require, promptly and authoritatively ascertained. The Committee of the Federation had constantly endeavoured to proceed on the lines indicated. It had avoided dissipating its strength and the strength of the Party upon a multitude of objects, endeavouring rather to concentrate attention on questions of pressing importance with regard to which the mind of the Party as a whole had been made up. Then comes a special request for the support of all members of the Federation in adhering to the policy, laid down in the original statement already quoted, that no formal programme would be submitted for acceptance. The Report says:—"Much has been said and written of the Nottingham programme. Neither the resolutions which were submitted at Nottingham, nor the resolutions which are submitted at the present meeting of the Council, are intended to constitute a political programme. The resolutions which were submitted last year and those which will be submitted this year refer to subjects upon which there is a general consensus of opinion in the Liberal ranks. Every question added which is not thus approved tends to divide and weaken the Party. There is no finality however in the resolutions submitted, and the advocates of other questions not included must not suppose that there is any intention to put aside the objects for which they care, but should understand that those questions are in the stage of discussion, and that the

responsibility lies upon their advocates to so instruct the public mind that they may secure for them a place amongst the recognised objects of the Party."

There is always a tendency in matters of this kind to increase rather than to diminish the number of subjects which appear of much importance. From time to time the prominence given to the several items of business varies with the varying demands of the moment. From time to time the Liberal Party succeeds in carrying one or another of its articles into law, though such measures are always sadly emasculated by the Tory Second Chamber. Sometimes the Tories themselves take up a Liberal belief which they have long denounced, and water it down, and make it their own measure in order "to dish the Whigs." There are only two objections to the widest possible declarations of belief. The first is that they may be gradually solidified into a creed, every item of which every candidate is required to affirm before he is accepted by the place for which he wishes to stand, regardless of the fact that such an affirmation of the acceptance of principle is, in the absence of direct definition, only of value in the somewhat exceptional case of a politician "who will swear to his own hurt and alter not." The second objection is that these declarations may at times become sources of embarrassment and even of danger to the Liberal Government because of the unreasonable clamour for precedence made upon the part of their admirers. This is a real trouble which during the last twenty-five years every Liberal Government has had to face, but the rule should surely be and should be clearly understood to be that, while the Party expresses to its Leaders the subjects which it considers to be of paramount importance, and each of which, if taken up by its Leaders, it will do its utmost to enable them to carry, it is for the Leaders, and the Leaders alone, to decide the order of precedence. They have information on many matters which must be thoroughly weighed in order to

enable a clear conclusion to be come to, and information which outsiders cannot possess. No plank has ever been laid down on the Liberal platform to be taken up again and many have been permanently nailed down. I should have said permanently and finally, but the war in South Africa, the ready delusion of the electorate, and the results which it has had upon home politics have shown us more clearly than ever before that liberty can only be insured by eternal vigilance.

At the great meeting at Manchester the resolutions dealt with seventeen distinct questions and were spoken to by thirty-nine gentlemen. I need not go through them. The question of Disestablishment generally, and specially the Disestablishment of the Church in Wales, was very much to the front and awakened a deep response in the hearts of the Liberal representatives. But I think I am right in saying that there was only one resolution which treated of a matter which had not before passed an annual meeting of the Federation. It was proposed by Mr G. Leveson Gower and seconded by Mr W. A. M'Arthur, M.P., and powerfully supported by Sir William Harcourt, "That this Council declares its belief that the true policy of Great Britain is to avoid all entanglements in Continental quarrels and to promote the just and wise principle of International Arbitration." The proposer said that this principle of arbitration was not what might be called a pious opinion held by the Liberal Party; it was rather a living faith and a lasting tradition, and the seconder of the resolution stated that he did not believe that the common people of any country in the world ever desired to fight with the common people of any other country in the world. As an Australian he was quite sure of one thing, and that was that the Federation of the Empire, which was so much spoken of, was absolutely and utterly impossible until this country once and for all declared to her Colonies and the world at

large that she had done with war, except in self defence.

The meetings at Manchester were altogether of a memorable character, and they were followed immediately by a remarkable victory at Eccles where Mr H. J. Robey, the President of the Manchester Liberal Union and a member of the General Purposes Committee of the Federation, won a seat which had been held by the Tories both in 1885 and 1886.

The Federation had again the great advantage of the presence of their noble chief, and the enthusiasm with which he was received by the vast population of the great Lancashire district indicated the ever-increasing hold which he had upon the confidence and affection of the great mass of the community. Mr Gladstone addressed a meeting in the Free Trade Hall on the afternoon of 2nd December. It was largely local in its character, an address being presented to him from the Liberals of the forty-four Parliamentary constituencies in and near Manchester, and also a special address from ninety thousand Irish residents in Manchester, assuring him of the gratitude of the Irish race for his exertions in their cause, and that all Irishmen, no matter at what altar they might kneel, would take their share in perfecting the work which he had begun.

In the address from the Liberal Associations there occurred the passage, "You have denounced the oppressor and proclaimed help to the oppressed, abroad as well as at home. In you the Italians have had an ardent champion, the Bulgarians a supporter in their bitter hour of need, the Greeks a lifelong and watchful advocate. Your sense of justice is quick to hear the cry of wrong from all parts of the world, your voice is seldom raised in vain in the cause of liberty, justice, and humanity."

Mr Gladstone laid special stress upon this passage at the commencement of his speech, and it led to some very interesting remarks upon Foreign affairs. He said that "he conceived that the first duty of an

Opposition in respect of Foreign affairs was the duty of a great forbearance, of a just, a grateful, and even a charitable interpretation. "Upon that principle we have been acting for three years and more, and I am far from thinking that we have had, on the whole, ground to lament it. In the time of the Beaconsfield Government we had to pursue a very different course. We made our appeals steadily, firmly, and enthusiastically, from Parliament to the people, and the Nation answered to the voice which we raised on behalf of what, we thought, was the cause of justice, freedom, and humanity. It is to me agreeable to think that, during the last three years, the pages of Parliamentary history have been comparatively blank with reference to Foreign affairs, and to think also that the silence has not been due to any departure on our part from the principles which we endeavoured to inculcate between 1876 and 1880. It has been due to this that we have been able to recognize in the conduct of Foreign affairs a nearer approach at any rate to what we think should be the true standard of British principles." He then pointed out the dangers which arose from Lord Salisbury, for the first time, uniting the offices of Foreign Minister and of Prime Minister, a departure from the established rule and precedent of every Government. And then he spoke about Armenia and the painful incidents which had marked its recent history. An Inquisition had been going forward into the matter in Constantinople. Then he proceeds, "I am sorry to say that the outer signs of that inquisition appear to suggest this conclusion, that the whole hope of Armenia rests, not in a sense of justice on the part of the Turkish Government, but on the public opinion of Europe, and, above all, on the public opinion of this country. I must remind you that to that people, Armenia, we have chosen to undertake an extraordinary responsibility. In 1856 it was made a portion of the law of Europe that no territorial change affecting the Turkish Government should

take place except with the consent of the great Powers. In 1878, in defiance of the law of Europe, a secret Treaty was made between the Government of the day and the Turkish Government, by which there was handed over to us the pretended boon of the administration of the Island of Cyprus, and we undertook the solemn obligation under which, while Turkey was to provide for the execution of reforms and the establishment of good government in Armenia, we were to defend Armenia against invasion. The treaty was as foolish as it was illegal in the view of European law, but there it is, and the Turkish Government will grossly delude itself if it supposes that, unless those reforms are executed, and unless the duties of civilized government are tolerably performed, this country will ever draw its sword or will ever open its purse for the maintenance of Turkish misgovernment and oppression. I am not going to pronounce premature or absolute censures on the Government. I know very well how difficult it is to deal with these abuses in the case of a country constituted as is the Turkish empire, but one thing I do hope and pray, and that is that the Government will not gloss over the truth, that they will not use honeyed words in regard to matters which involve human life, liberty, and property, and that which is more sacred still, which involve at almost every point the maintenance of female honour. Whatever the Government do, let us know the facts, and let us not be put off with apologies, with defences or palliations for cruelty and for wickedness."

This is sixteen years ago, and the difficulties and the iniquities which have been suffered by the Armenian people at the hands of the Turks have never ceased, and to those iniquities are now added the fresh ones which they suffer at the hands of the Russian Government.

He then passed from foreign affairs to deal with domestic matters, and it is interesting to note that amongst those, he spoke specially as to the Sugar

Convention Bill, which he described as a Bill for increasing the price of sugar, a Bill for enabling the British market to be influenced, and perhaps vitally influenced, by the formation of sugar rings in foreign countries, a Bill to repress if not extinguish a most valuable trade in this country, a trade in preserving fruits, which goes directly to help the cottage gardener, to help the orchard farmer, to help every man who applies himself to using the excellent facilities of this country and of its climate for the production of fruit; that trade which is now rapidly growing and extending, was seriously threatened by this Sugar Convention Bill. He did not discuss it further because he did not believe that it would come to serious argument in the House of Commons or would ever take its place in the Statute book of this country. As I have already pointed out it has done so, and this country has seriously suffered in consequence. There is not a household in the land which does not feel the effect of the evil measure to increase the price of sugar which was carried by the Tory Government. The concluding part of this speech of Mr Gladstone's was devoted to the legislation of the future, and he indicated the course which should be pursued in the subjects of registration, land, and local government, dealing with each briefly but in a masterly manner. He spoke in all an hour and twenty-five minutes on this occasion.

The next night he addressed a great gathering in the Free Trade Hall, which was crowded nearly an hour before the time fixed for the commencement of the proceedings. This speech was entirely devoted to the Irish question. Amongst other important matters he said, and with perfect truth, "But let me beg you to be aware of this, that the serious disintegration of the Liberal Party did not begin in 1886. For a long time the wealthy and the powerful had been gradually detaching themselves from the body of the Liberal Party and finding their most natural associations in Toryism, in stagnation and in resistance.

For some of them it was a perfect Godsend when Home Rule turned up and supplied them with a plausible excuse for doing ostensibly or even ostentatiously that which in their hearts they had been longing for an excuse to do." Mr Gladstone took five tests of a good or bad government. They were, first of all, its economy, assuming efficiency to be equal; next its legality, and the sentiment of loyalty generated amongst the people; then the contentment of the people and their attachment to the Government; next the wealth of the people; and finally the credit and reputation which accrued to the country in consequence of the passing of good laws. He pointed out how Ireland was freer from crime than England, and that the Government had made no steady effort to put down crime. Agrarian crime had enormously diminished in Ireland, but that was under Lord Spencer when the agrarian offences of Ireland were reduced from 4500 or more in a year to something over 700; but, he added with great force, "It is not crime at all against which the Act has been worked; it is the combinations of the people, those combinations which may not be desirable, but which are in many cases necessary, and in this country are absolutely lawful until they lead to a breach of what is known as the general law of the country. In connection with these combinations under the Coercion Act the Government had put some couple of thousand people into prison, including a third or fourth part of the Members of Parliament who represented the Irish people, and about a dozen of their priests."

Mr Gladstone spoke for an hour and twenty minutes, and, at the same time, a very large and enthusiastic overflow meeting was being held in St. James's Hall and was presided over by Lord Aberdeen, who received a magnificent ovation on rising, and succeeded it by a remarkably fine speech. Mr William Redmond, M.P., was received with enthusiastic applause when he was called upon to address

the meeting, and it is worth while quoting the exact words of the opening of his speech, because it shows more clearly the terrible state of affairs which existed under the Tory Rule, and which it is for this country to ensure shall never recur. He said, " His reception was one which cheered him and which would cheer his colleagues. It would cheer William O'Brien in gaol, and he would like the Government to remember that, so long as one of them remained at liberty, they would preach the gospel for which their brothers suffered. The end of this month would see Mr O'Brien restored to liberty, and he would then be able to go among the people of this land and plead to them the cause of Ireland. The end of this month would also see his (Mr Redmond's) liberty taken from him, for once more he stood under sentence of imprisonment from Mr Balfour's Government. He mentioned that not to boast of it, although the greatest boast of an Irishman was that he had earned imprisonment at the hands of Mr Balfour. He mentioned it to show that the good cause of Ireland unceasingly went on."

The Women's Liberal Federation held a two days' conference at Manchester during the meetings of the National Liberal Federation, and, in the afternoon of the first day, there was a reception at the Town Hall, when Mrs Gladstone was presented with an Address from the Women's Liberal Associations of Lancashire and Cheshire. This meeting was a striking success, and, in response to the Address, as well as in acknowledgment of the gift of a cloak made for her by the peasants at Carna in the western portion of Connemara, Mrs Gladstone made two admirable little speeches.

A public evening meeting was held in connection with the Women's Liberal Conference and was addressed amongst others by Lady Sandhurst and Mrs Jacob Bright. There was also a largely attended meeting of the Association of Liberal Agents and Secretaries which was addressed by the Right

Honourable James Stansfeld, M.P., so that the Annual gathering at Manchester was conspicuous not only for the enthusiasm but for the number of the meetings which were held in connection with it.

Special Council Meeting, February 1890, to consider result of Parnell Commission

On the 18th February 1890 there was a special meeting of the Council of the Federation called by telegram and held at the National Liberal Club to consider the result of the Parnell Commission. This meeting resolved, "That in the opinion of this Council of the National Liberal Federation the appointment of a special Tribunal to try charges and allegations made by anonymous writers against a political Party was unprecedented and unconstitutional; that the *Times*, though aided by the resources of the Government, has been convicted by the Commissioners of a long series of the foulest and most malignant libels to be found in our political history; that the Irish Members have been completely acquitted of every specific charge directly affecting their personal honour and character; that the report, in so far as it deals with matters of general and constructive inference, leaves the political controversy exactly where it was, in as much as the Commissioners have excluded from consideration the all-important political questions of,

"(1) Whether the action of the accused was not palliated by the circumstances of the time,

"(2) Whether that action was not in fact the means of securing beneficent legislation for Ireland,

"(3) Whether the views and aims of the Irish National Party have not been radically transformed since 1885, the date to which the Commissioners limited their Inquiry;

"Finally, the Council congratulates Mr Parnell and the Irish Members on having won from the Commis-

sion so triumphant a vindication of their honour. The Council regrets that the Commissioners have not thought fit to condemn the criminal recklessness with which infamous calumnies and forgeries have been employed against Members of the House of Commons, and the Council further declares that it is the duty of the Government to make early and public reparation to Mr Parnell for years of unmerited suffering and obloquy."

There can be no doubt that these resolutions accurately represented the preponderating opinion not only of the Liberal Party, but of the country. The Report of the Commission was discussed in both Houses, and in the House of Commons seven days were occupied over the motion proposed by the Government that the House should adopt the report, and thank the judges for their just and impartial conduct, and order the report to be entered on the Journals. To this Mr Gladstone proposed an amendment, which really was a condensation of the resolutions of the Meeting of the Council, and stated that "the House deemed it to be a duty to record its reprobation of the foulest charges of the gravest and most odious description, based on calumny and on forgery, that had been brought against members of the House, and, while declaring its satisfaction at the exposure of the calumnies, the House expresses its regret at the wrong inflicted and the suffering and loss endured during a protracted period by reason of those acts of flagrant iniquity."

In Mr Morley's *Life of Mr Gladstone* he says, "When the speaker came to the findings and the acquittal, to the dismissal of the infamous charges of the forged letters, of intimacy with the Invincibles, of being accessory to the assassinations in the Park, glowing passion in voice and gesture reached its most powerful pitch, and the moral appeal at its close was long remembered among the most searching words that he had spoken. It was not forensic argument, it was not literature, it had every note of true oratory,

of fervid direct and pressing call to his hearers "as individuals, man by man, not with a responsibility diffused and severed until it became inoperative and worthless, to place himself in the position of the victim of this frightful outrage, to give such a judgment as would bear the scrutiny of the heart and of the conscience of every man when he betook himself to his chamber and was still."

But it was all of no avail. Tory consciences are proof against penetration by noble sentiment. When Mr Balfour's Land Purchase Bill was laid before the House of Commons, the Committee issued a circular pointing out what had happened already under the Ashburn Act to put money into the hands of Irish landlords and condemning any scheme of land purchase in Ireland which would entail the risk of burdening the British taxpayer for the benefit of the Irish landlords. The Bill was left over ultimately until the autumn Session when to propitiate that ever hungry body, it was pushed through.

In May 1890 there was an important Conference held at Norwich, which endorsed the resolutions of the Federation passed at Manchester, discussed the reform of the Land Laws, and declared that Local Government should be developed and completed by the early establishment of District and Parish Councils.

In the evening a great meeting was held in the Agricultural Hall and was addressed by Mr Gladstone who spoke chiefly upon the Report of the Parnell Commission, the Irish Policy of the Government, and what he described as the "Public House Endowment Bill." On the following day he delivered a speech of much interest at Lowestoft, dealing mainly with the question of foreign policy. Other conferences and demonstrations were held under the auspices of the Home Counties Committee at Tunbridge Wells, Ramsgate, Brighton, Aylesbury, Bishop Stortford, and Alton; and the intense interest which was being taken in political matters was well shown by the fact that these demonstrations were

addressed by (amongst others) Lord Granville, Sir G. O. Trevelyan, M.P., Lord Herschell, Lord Kimberley, and Sir Charles Russell.

The Annual meeting of the General Committee was held in Birmingham in June, when it was resolved to make an investigation into the condition of Liberal organization throughout the country, and to ask the General Purposes Committee to consider the wisdom of at once raising a National Fund to be spent in improving and perfecting the work of registration in the constituencies, and in systematic political education, and in such other ways as might be necessary in order to secure a complete triumph of the Liberal Party at the polls. At this meeting there was also a resolution carried dealing with Welsh Disestablishment which, it was claimed, should take a position next after the Irish question in the programme on which the Party appealed to the country at the next General Election and, following this resolution, a very influential deputation met the General Purposes Committee on 17th July.

Afterwards a communication was made to Mr (now Lord Rendel) Stuart Rendel, M.P., the President of the Welsh National Council, that the General Purposes Committee at the next Annual meeting of the Federation would recommend that Welsh Disestablishment should be dealt with in a separate resolution to stand next to the motion on Irish Home Rule on the Agenda of the meeting, and that it should be the resolution carried at the Annual meeting in Manchester with the alteration that Welsh Disestablishment and Disendowment should be dealt with in the next Parliament as soon as Irish Home Rule was attained. The General Purposes Committee would also represent to the Leaders of the Party the necessity of including this question in the programme upon which the country was appealed to, so that the next Government might have an undeniable mandate to deal with the subject in the next Parliament.

Annual Meeting, Sheffield, 1890

In the Report which was presented to the Annual meeting held in Sheffield in November 1890, the Committee impressed upon the Federated Associations that it would always welcome any information or suggestions which would aid in directing the policy or administration of the Federation, and they noted that they had this year instructed the officers to inquire from each of the Federated Associations whether they wished to make any suggestion to the Committee for its guidance in framing the resolutions to be submitted to the Annual meeting. They explained that as, at the Annual meeting, there could necessarily be no general discussion, the resolutions should be such as it was believed had been accepted by the greatly preponderating majority of the Liberal Party; they must be such as would be not merely acquiesced in but fought for by the Party as a whole, if circumstances should arise to bring them immediately to the front. There were many matters of great interest which could not be placed in this category, questions in the stage of discussion, for example, might be discussed at meetings of the General Committee, and such meetings would be called whenever the demand for a discussion was general.

Preparations were being made in all directions for the General Election which was evidently to be in the not distant future. The Parnell Commission had placed the great Irish Leader in a position not only of eminence but of popularity throughout the United Kingdom. The working of the Coercion Act had disgusted the whole of the constituencies. The enormous amount of education upon the Irish question which had gone on now for four years throughout the whole country had produced its natural effect, and the prospects of Home Rule for Ireland had never been brighter. It was indeed as though,

after a long and anxious voyage, the good ship was coming in on the very crest of the wave of victory. At this moment, when Home Rule for Ireland was all but *un fait accompli*, on the very day on which the Parliamentary forces began to gather at Sheffield, the unforeseen happened, and the personal wrong-doing of one of the Irish chiefs threw back the cause of justice for his country, and ensured that the mighty master-mind which had ventured to formulate a scheme for obtaining it should not see it carried into execution. Mr Gladstone was absent from the Sheffield meetings, but he was closely present in the hearts and thoughts of his enthusiastic followers; their prevailing determination was then, as it is now, that nothing should stand in the way of the ultimate accomplishment of this act of national righteousness and reparation.

At this meeting Sir James Kitson, who had guided the affairs of the Federation since his appointment to the Presidency in November 1883 with remarkable judgment and courage through dark and troublous times, resigned the office he had held so well, and the first duty of the new President (Dr Spence Watson) was moving the grateful acknowledgment of the Federation to him for his great services, and its high appreciation of his personal character and unselfish devotion to the Liberal cause. The President took the opportunity of explaining that the most important object we had was to ensure strength and unity in action rather than to inquire into any speculative belief. There was no wish on the part of any one to hinder the widest and freest discussion; freedom was the vital breath of Liberalism, they encouraged in every way the fullest collision of mind. Some of them advocated, and always had advocated, the freest course for what they believed to be error. There was probably scarcely a truth which anyone present held and was prepared to sacrifice anything for which was not at one time in the history of mankind a damnable heresy, and, knowing that, he could not conceive that

any true Liberal could in any way oppose the preaching and the teaching even of that which he believed to be error. Let him do as they had all done in their time, let him, if he held a question dearly, not try to carry it in the way which was becoming too much the fashion in certain quarters of endeavouring to force things forward by threats, but take the sensible, the practical, and the only true way, by argument and persuasion, of converting his minority into a majority. Honest and earnest men could be convinced but they never would be coerced.

Mr Morley addressed the first meeting of the Conference and he spoke about labour questions and labour representation. He pointed out a paragraph which had been taken from a previous report, and was renewed in that presented at this meeting, that the difficulties connected with labour representation were not difficulties arising in the slightest degree with the Leaders of the Party. So far as he knew the Councils of the Leaders of the Liberal Party and was in any way entitled to speak for them, there was nothing they desired more than to increase the representation of labour, because they believed that nothing is so important in the House of Commons as to hear what the actual representatives of labour think. And, on the other hand, nothing was more desirable than that the Representatives of Labour themselves should come on the floor of the House of Commons and thrash out their questions face to face. He spoke also upon the Eight Hours question, upon Municipal and State intervention, which he did not oppose so long as it was shown to him that they could achieve some good end which could not be reached without them, but he greatly preferred Municipal to State intervention. He complained of the manner in which the Chief Secretary for Ireland was lowering the tone of political controversy and degrading public life.

The slight allusion which he made to the overshadowing question of the moment is worth re-

cording. "We have special difficulties and anxieties at this moment; we never expected when we embarked on this voyage that we were going to have cloudless skies and summer seas; we knew we should have difficulties. I read the other day a sentence in the *Spectator*, concluding a review of Mr Lecky's two last volumes upon Ireland, and the writer winds up, sincerely I am sure, with the mournful reflection that it seems as if Ireland was always to be the sport of a perverse and melancholy destiny. Gentlemen, that is not our doctrine, that is not the doctrine of the Liberal Party in this country. We have made up our minds that Ireland, neglected, treated with indifference by Great Britain, has floated along, drifted along miserably enough, but we have put our hand to the work to give an aim to the destiny of Ireland, its destiny is to be aimless no longer. We must to-day, as we have done for the last four or five years, we must, in the prosecution of a great cause which our opponents constantly endeavour to discredit by mixing it up with matter which is either irrelevant or which is secondary, keep this great and national question apart from what does not belong to it; and it is our duty now, as always, to hold the question itself aloft to public view. This no doubt opens out difficulty at a moment when the country has been peculiarly stirred by unusual incidents and painful disclosures, only let us recognise that none of those incidents and disclosures derogate in the slightest degree from the justice or the urgency or the sacredness of our great cause. That cause is as sound to-day as it has ever been, and it becomes from day to day more urgent as it draws nearer to the final issue. So that it is more than ever necessary and, with these words, gentlemen, I will leave it, it is more than ever necessary to look at the cause on the merits, and to allow nothing else, however grave and however material to be considered in its proper time and place, to slacken for a moment our devotion to what we have undertaken."

After condemning the Government policy in Ireland, the question of Welsh Disestablishment was brought forward as promised, the Honourable Bernard Coleridge, M.P., moving that "this Council is of opinion that the time has come for the Disestablishment and Disendowment of the Church of England in Wales and for the application of the Tithes to public purposes and declares that this question should be dealt with in the next Parliament as soon as Irish Home Rule is attained." Professor Ellis Edwards of the North Wales Liberal Association seconded the resolution, and it was supported by Mr Frank Edwards, the Liberal Candidate for Radnorshire, and Mr Lloyd George, M.P.

On the second day the Right Honourable A. J. Mundella moved a resolution, which he named the "Omnibus Resolution," and which affirmed and repeated the declarations of the Council in favour of a very large number of political reforms to which the Federation had given its adherence. Sir Wilfred Lawson began his speech in support of it in words which it is worth while to quote: he said, "What had he got to do. He had to disestablish the Church, he had to abolish the liquor traffic and send the House of Lords to Jericho, and all in the space of ten minutes. Well, he would do his best. He would act in the same way as the Frenchman who went out hunting. When he saw the fox, instead of letting the hounds pursue it in the orthodox Christian fashion, he began to gallop after it, upon which the indignant huntsman cried out, 'Hold hard, sir, do you think you can catch the fox?' 'I do not know,' was the reply, 'but I will try.' So he would do his best with the State Church, with the liquor traffic, and the Lords. If he did not succeed in dealing them a fatal blow he would leave them to the tender mercies of Sir William Harcourt who was to follow." Then Sir William Harcourt followed and had a great reception and made a remarkably fine speech.

He began by dealing with an attack which Lord

Hartington had made upon him accusing him of obstruction because of the ninety-two speeches which he had made during the Session in one hundred and twenty-five sittings, and he pointed out that a greater obstructor of the Government than himself was the Chancellor of the Exchequer who had made two hundred and fifteen speeches; and, he added, "If Mr Goschen made two hundred and fifteen speeches in order to lose his Public House Bill, and it only required ninety-two speeches to throw that Bill out, it seems to me that on the whole our expenditure of time was more economical and more sensible." Completing this portion of his speech Sir William Harcourt said, "At the close of the Session, in one of the many speeches which he made, Lord Hartington compared me to Miriam. I have been the subject of many less flattering comparisons. I have no objection to being compared to Miriam. I believe she was a very respectable person. She was a prophetess, and I have no doubt in these days would have been a very eminent member of some female political organisation. He says I rejoiced at the confusion of the Government, and that the horse and the rider were cast into the sea. Well, sir, Miriam rejoiced, and she had great reason to rejoice, for it was after the deliverance of herself and her people from the land of Goschen, and therefore I am quite prepared to take the comparison of Lord Hartington in good part. But he is entirely mistaken as to what my view is. I ventured to state it to my constituents at the end of August. I did not rejoice that the time of the Session had been wasted by obstruction. What I did say was that it was a burning shame that the time of Parliament should have been wasted by the Government in measures universally condemned. I rejoiced of course that those measures were defeated, but I equally condemned the waste of parliamentary time. In my opinion it is perfectly unjust for the Government to raise this cry of obstruction to cover their own incapacity." He then

went on to show why the country was against the Government, and to support what had been admirably said by Mr Morley as to the two parties and the two policies.

On the evening of the first day of the Conference, 20th November, a dinner was given at the Reform Club, with Mr A. H. D. Acland, M.P., in the chair, to a number of the representatives present at the Federation meetings, and, on the same evening, the President of the Sheffield United Liberal Committee, Sir F. K. Mappin, Bart, M.P., gave a reception to the delegates at the Cutlers' Hall. Arrangements were made to accommodate the large number present, and the various halls all through the evening presented not only a thronged but a brilliant appearance. Speeches were made from the daïs by delegates who were called upon by the meeting, and Mr H. J. Wilson, M.P., in concluding the speaking, said that he had never seen such a gathering in that hall, which was consecrated pretty well to Toryism of the bluest type. For the first time it was having a Radical gathering held within its walls.

The next night the largest Liberal meeting which was ever held in Sheffield, and one of the greatest ever held by the Federation, was gathered in the drill hall, when nearly 10,000 people were present. The meeting was presided over by the president of the Federation, and listened to words of encouragement from the most prominent of that gallant band of men who, when the wealth, the "intellect," and the stupidity, of the United Kingdom deserted, stood staunch and firm to their noble leader. Sir William Harcourt spoke first, and devoted his speech almost entirely to the Irish question. It was a powerful argument, and ended with the words, "Let us have the courage to be wise; let us have the prudence to be just; that is true Statesmanship. It is from fear that proceed cruelty and coercion. That is the spirit that inspires them both. It is only from confidence and from faith that can come recon-

ciliation and peace. Is not this a particular and intelligible issue to be placed before an intelligent people? These are the principles upon which we have proceeded and upon which we intend to proceed. These are principles, gentlemen, which are not dependent upon time or season; these are principles which do not depend upon the conduct of this man or that; these are the eternal principles of justice and of truth; they are principles worthy of this Federation; they are worthy of a great Leader and a righteous cause!"

It must be borne in mind that this meeting, as all of the meetings of this Annual gathering, was held under a very great strain because of the immediate development of the catastrophe in connection with the Irish question. Nothing could be said to advantage in the discussion of this special phase of it. Our great Leader himself was not present; there had not been time to consider the probable development which must follow upon that which so unexpectedly occurred; it was a time when men had to be wary of their words. The real question was one for the Irish Members rather than for the representatives of English Liberal opinion, and thus but little was said from first to last which bore immediately upon that which was uppermost in the minds of everyone.

The speakers who followed were the Right Honourable A. J. Mundella, M.P., the Honourable Bernard Coleridge, M.P., and the Right Honourable John Morley, M.P., who was received with extraordinary enthusiasm. He proceeded in a short but powerful speech to point out the progress which had been made towards Home Rule. "For my part if we were to lose the next General Election I would still rejoice in what we have done during the last five years. What have we done? Is it nothing to have weakened, if not wiped away, the bitter and strong prejudice of race? Is it nothing to have wiped away or weakened the prejudices of people in religion? Is it nothing to have persuaded the people of Ireland,

those neglected, down-trodden people, that they have on this side of the Channel friends as good, friends as staunch, friends as emphatic, friends as determined, to stand by them, as they can find on the other side of the Atlantic to which for many years they have looked for support? They have hitherto looked to the West, they now look to the East too, and they see in the East the beacon of hope shining for them. I agree emphatically as to what Mr Coleridge said as to the new spirit that we need to pour into our politics."

First Breakfast to Agents

This meeting of the Council was the first at which the General Purposes Committee of the Federation entertained the Liberal Secretaries and Agents at breakfast. The President of the Federation took the Chair, and there were also present the Right Honourable A. J. Mundella, M.P., Sir Walter Foster, M.P., Mr A. H. Dyke Acland, M.P., Mr H. J. Wilson, M.P., Mr Schnadhorst, and most of the members of the General Purposes Committee. The innovation proved very successful, and the meeting was an enjoyable and useful one. It has now become the annual practice, the Chief Liberal Whip generally joining the President of the Federation as host on the occasion. The Liberal Agents have stood firm through troublous times and in spite of much temptation. They are a body of true politicians of which the Party is proud. It is probable that, in the troublous and conflicting times which the concluding years of the century brought to the Party, no small share in the healthy and cementing influences which prevented the often threatened severance from internal and needless dissensions, must be given to the friendly and helpful nature of these social gatherings.

Both at the evening meeting on the preceding night and at this breakfast, Mr Bradlaugh was called upon and said a few words. It was the only time that he ever attended the meetings of the Federation. Justice

had not yet been done to him in the House of Commons, and his strenuous life was drawing to a close.

In the early part of 1891 the General Committee appointed eleven district agents, grouping the constituencies throughout the country, with the exception of those which came under the more immediate purview of the Home Counties Division of the Federation. The object was to make a complete investigation of the state of the organization of the Party throughout the country. No interference of any kind with the sphere of any local Association was intended. The District agents were to inquire in order to discover weak places and to offer such assistance as might be acceptable and necessary. It is indeed much to be desired that the financial support which is given to the Central body should be sufficient to enable it to appoint such Agents regularly and to keep them constantly employed at all times. Men who can thoroughly and judiciously accomplish the work required must combine industry, patience, zeal and enthusiasm, with tact, and such men are not readily to be found, but when once they have been found and proved efficient they should not be parted with.

Labour Representation

The long vexed question of Labour Representation was brought before the General Committee by the Metropolitan Radical Federation under the mistaken supposition that the officials of the National Liberal Federation had in some way control of the Federated Associations and could deal with the representation of the allied constituencies in Parliament. The request made was that the retirement or voluntary withdrawal of fifty Liberal candidates should be urged upon the Metropolis and the country, so that fifty seats might, at the next General Election, be placed at the disposal of, and should be contested by, direct representatives of Trade Unions and the Labour

Party. This request was of course based upon an entire misconception of the facts of the case, and this was carefully pointed out. But, at the same time, it was shown that the very grave difficulties attending the question of Labour Representation did not arise from the Leaders of the Party, who would gladly welcome more Labour representatives in the House of Commons, nor from those responsible for the organisation of the Party, who were prepared to use such legitimate influence as they possessed to assist this cause. This influence had been and would be exercised, and it was hoped with satisfactory results to Labour Representation and to the Liberal cause. Wherever the demand for a Labour candidate existed, and a suitable man was within reach, the Committee earnestly bespoke for him the generous consideration of the Liberal Association.

But I must leave here the History of the Federation for a brief space and deal with this question of Labour representation at more length. It has been confused at times from ignorance of the true position of matters, at times designedly and with something of a sinister purpose, with the question of that offshoot of state socialism, a Labour Party. Now let us look at it first upon its own merits.

Those who have taken part in political agitation for half a century will bear me out when I say that there was no talk of a Labour Party until some twenty years ago. Then everywhere, as now, in the great majority of constituencies, the Liberal Party was one and indivisible, the working men being its very backbone, I might also say its life and soul. There was no question which had for its undisputed object the good of the people which the Liberal Party neglected or refused to give adhesion to. The local Leaders everywhere were closely in touch and in entire sympathy with the working men. Every battle fought, every victory won was against privilege, against class, and for the people. Numbers of men gave up their leisure, and spent their money and their

lives, with the object of endeavouring to make the conditions of life more possible for the whole of the people of the United Kingdom, and that life itself higher, nobler, purer and better. There were questions, as there are questions, upon which Liberals differed, such as the fixing of the conditions of labour by law, the municipalisation of industries, and the like, but, on these as on all matters, there was no question of Liberalism or Labour. The question and the only question was the real good of the great majority of the people, and working men in their own gatherings differed amongst themselves upon them as much as did the Liberals of whom the working men formed the great majority.

But the Labour Party (now called the Independent Labour Party) was a political organisation formed with the direct object of pushing forward what were called Labour questions, and without reference to anything else. As a fact, it was more frequently opposed to Liberal than to Tory candidates. It ignored the fact that working men were politicians and that, as such, they took an interest in all questions of general politics affecting the whole community; or that frequently they preferred not to have working-men candidates. The reasonable demand that a working man who was a candidate for a constituency should, in general politics, hold and announce clear and definite views, was scouted or denounced as a trap. Even in such a constituency as Newcastle, when one of the best Liberal Members who ever lived, and an ex-Cabinet Minister, had agreed to stand with a working man candidate, and the Liberal Committee had consented, but the "Nine hundred," (two thirds of whom were working men) refused to confirm the choice, the Labour Party, worked and managed from London, ran one of their candidates with the avowed and successful object of making a Liberal city return Tory members, regardless of the loss to the district and the country.

Now this is the road to nowhere. All Liberals admit that Labour is insufficiently represented in the

House of Commons. All Liberals will not agree that Labour can only be represented by working men; all Liberals will not agree that the question of what a man is should be the only or chief consideration in choosing a representative or a candidate. Possibly most Liberals who are working men will agree that, other things being equal, and Labour being insufficiently represented, the fact that a candidate is a working man should give him the preference over one who is not; but the country is to be considered before any class of its citizens, however large and important, and the preference should only be given where other things are equal.

It has always been the practice of the Federation to exercise its influence in order to secure the adoption of Labour candidates by Liberal organisations wherever practicable, but it has never had any authority in the selection of candidates so as to obtain the selection of Labour candidates and to secure their election. There must be a general acceptance of the man suggested in each case by all sections of the Party in the locality affected.

There must always be a great difficulty in obtaining working men candidates so long as the cost of elections continues so heavy as it is, and so long as a Member of Parliament has to give up his means of earning a livelihood in order to do his full duty to the constituency. The plan of the payment of a Member by a special Trade Union, although it has furnished some of the men who have been the very salt of the House of Commons, has never seemed to me to be quite satisfactory. It must have more or less the tendency to make the Member rather the delegate of a section of his constituents instead of, as upon his election he should become, the representative of the whole constituency. Since the year 1888 the Federation has strongly urged that the Returning Officer's expenses should be placed upon the rates, and, from the following year, 1889, that the principle

of the payment of Members of Parliament by the State should be recognised.

If these reforms were carried into law, the constituencies would no longer be limited in the freedom of their choice of representatives.

FREE EDUCATION

To return to my account of the regular working of the Federation. As early as 1885 the Federation had declared in favour of Free Education and, when in 1891 the Tory Government brought forward their assisted Education Bill which recognised this principle, a special meeting of the General Committee was held in London to consider the Bill. The resolution passed after a full discussion was "that this Committee expresses its satisfaction that the principle of Free Education, which the Liberal Party has so long advocated, is recognised in the Bill now before Parliament, but regrets

(*a*) That the proposed privilege is limited to children between the ages of five and fourteen:

(*b*) That while the additional sum of £2,000,000 per annum has been granted for educational purposes no attempt is made to increase the general efficiency of our National education:

(*c*) That there is no guarantee that, where in denominational schools the grant exceeds the amount of the existing fees, the surplus will not be applied merely to the relief of the subscribers instead of towards the improvement of the education given:

(*d*) That there is no attempt to redress the many grievances from which, especially in country districts, Noncomformists and others suffer, and which arise from the practical monopoly in education which, in such districts, one religious body possesses, and

(*e*) That the Bill entirely avoids any recognition of the principle of popular local control.

The Committee, whilst accepting the measure as an important step in the right direction, again specifically declares that no system of public elementary education can be regarded as satisfactory or final unless it secures that every family shall have within reasonable reach a free school, and that all schools supported by public money shall be subject to public and representative control."

But the most important of the reforms which was loudly calling for active operations was that to which the Federation had given its adhesion in 1882 when it declared in favour of local representative government of Counties and rural districts.

In 1888 the Tory Government once more took a page out of our book, and the Federation welcomed the Local Government Bill which that Government introduced, whilst regretting the alterations and mutilations which their scheme had been subjected to, so as to water it down to the capacities of the Tory County Members, but, from the first, they recognised that the duty of the Liberal party when it came into power would be to fill in the outline of the reform of County Government which the Tory administration had sketched.

Extension of Local Government

In 1889 they attempted the extension of the powers of the London County Council and of representative governing bodies, and the development and completion of local government by the establishment of District and Parish Councils, but unsuccessfully.

Reform in this matter was pressed upon the Committee from the affiliated associations from all parts of the country. It held a special meeting to consider the matter in the month of April, and subsequently several meetings were called, and a number of well-known members of Parliament who represented County constituencies were invited to attend and, as

a result, a number of suggestions were prepared as the basis of a programme to be urged upon the acceptance of the Liberal Party and the Leaders. It is not necessary to set these out *in extenso*. They dealt, in the first place, with Local Government and Parish Councils, defining the mode of election which was to be by ballot, the principle of one man one vote being observed, the dates and places of meeting, and the powers of the Council, which were exceedingly wide, including the control of allotments, the application of lands for small holdings, the provision and management of halls, libraries, recreation grounds, and public buildings, the control of parish charities, the supervision of commons, wastes, public footpaths, and rights of way, with power to take action in cases of encroachment, attention to the sanitary conditions and water supply. They also dealt with District Councils and, one of the headings was that of land and dwellings, with compulsory powers to the County Council, at the instance of the Parish Council, to purchase or acquire land at a fair price for public purposes, amongst which small holdings with security of tenure were included. Rating, education, and reform of the Magistracy, were also dealt with.

Mr John Morley made an important speech upon the subject at Stoneleigh in August, and indicated the view of the Liberal Leaders upon it; and Mr Gladstone wrote, "You may rest assured that the Liberal Party who, in the teeth of the House of Lords, procured the franchise for the agricultural labourer, did not thus arm him for nothing, and hope to do him full justice, in the first place, by bringing local government to his door, and securing for him a more free access to the use of the land."

The whole tone of the report shows that the Liberal Party was in good heart and was looking forward to a very early General Election with strenuous hope. As I proceed it will appear how the Liberal Party, having set its hand to this work, never ceased to

keep it in the forefront of the battle until victory had been won upon it.

ANNUAL MEETING, NEWCASTLE-UPON-TYNE, 1891

The fourteenth annual meeting of the Federation was held in October at Newcastle-upon-Tyne, and it is still remembered because of the intense earnestness which characterised the proceedings. It was remarkable upon many grounds. No fewer than 2500 delegates, representing 800 Liberal Associations throughout the country, attended, and the number of Members of both Houses of Parliament who were present was unusually large. But, most important of all, Mr Gladstone, who had not been present at Sheffield at the preceding meeting, once more and for the last time came to the annual meeting of the Federation on this occasion. The meeting also obtained great notoriety as the resolutions passed at the Council meetings attained historical importance under the title of "the Newcastle Programme." It is generally supposed that, on this occasion, there was a deliberate bringing forward of a number of advanced measures to be accepted as the articles of faith of the Liberal Party, and much nonsense has been talked about the action imagined to have been taken, and some harm has been done by zealous Party men taking the ideal programme for a creed every item of which must be adhered to by the true Liberal, whilst the Tory Party denounced the whole affair, which they never understood, as a dangerous or fantastic sham. Consider for a moment what the Newcastle Programme was. It was neither more nor less than the Nottingham programme, the Manchester programme, the Sheffield programme, or the programme of any other annual meeting of the Council of the Federation for years past. It was simply a series of resolutions stating what, in the view of the overwhelming majority of the Liberal Party, were the most important measures to be passed

into law, when, and as the Leaders of that Party saw the way to do it.

Have any of these measures been passed into law? Yes: considering the short period during which the Liberals have held office since the Newcastle meeting, remarkable progress has been made in carrying them into effect. District and Parish Councils have been obtained, the Factory Acts have been extended, and the Death Duties equalized, and the Irish Home Rule Bill passed through the one House in which the Liberals have any influence. The Welsh Disestablishment Bill was carried through Second Reading in the House of Commons, and The Liquor Traffic Control Bill and two measures of registration and electoral reform were brought in by the short-lived Liberal Government. This still left undealt with, Welsh and Scotch Disestablishment, the reform of the Land Laws, the direct popular veto of the Liquor traffic, the taxation of mining royalties, the free breakfast table, and the just division of rates between owner and occupier. Every one of these is waiting settlement until the Liberal Party shall have a sufficiently strong and long lease of power to deal with them thoroughly, and until it has obtained from the Sovereign full strength to prevent the House of Lords mutilating the measures passed by the chosen representatives of the people.

But three other matters were mentioned at Newcastle which were not dealt with by the Tory Government. One of these is that question of depriving the House of Lords of the power to mutilate Liberal Legislation which I shall shortly have to give fuller attention to. The others are the doing away with the imperfections in the measures of free education and London Government, both of which were stolen by the Tories from the Liberals, and passed in a sadly mutilated condition. It must always be borne in mind that the longer the Tory Government remained in power, the more time must be spent by any Liberal Government which succeeded it in making up manifest deficiencies in Tory legisla-

tion, and thus true Liberal reforms in many directions and of much consequence might be more or less delayed.

I need not deal in any detail with the meeting at Newcastle. At the first gathering of the Council Mr John Morley was one of the speakers, and his speech is well worth careful study still. Amongst other things, he said that nearly all the questions before the meeting turned upon the principle of privilege, the question which divides the Liberal Party from the Tory is the question of privilege. The Tory is the man who wants to "maintain privilege, and the Liberal is the man to stand up for equality." He spoke at considerable length upon the question of Labour representation. He said admirably, "That we cannot hear too constantly, too articulately, too clearly, the voice of our working population. After all, the working population are the great bulk, are the great mass of the nation. I have quoted Mr Bright once this afternoon, I will quote him again. He said: 'A nation dwells in its cottages.' That is a beautiful and pregnant saying. And it is those who dwell in cottages, whether in town or country, whose views we desire to hear. I am not a flatterer; I am not going to say that their voice will always demand something wise. They will make mistakes. Even landlords and Dukes have made mistakes. They will make mistakes, but they will right themselves. What is important—and our democracy is a farce if we don't recognise that, and act on it,—what is important, is that we should hear what they have to say—that they should have opportunity, full opportunity of delivering their voices in places where that voice is most sure to be heard. I should like to see every restriction abolished which makes it difficult for a workman to find a place either on the municipal councils or on the School Boards,—aye, or in the great Senate of the nation itself. We must abolish every restriction, and, though it is a very vulgar restriction, it is a very effective one—the enormous expenses of elections which are

now cast upon candidates. And then there is another thing. I do not know how you are going to get the voice of your workmen heard in the senate of the country unless you do what every other nation of the earth with a Constitution does—unless you place some moderate sustenance within the reach of those who aspire to represent the people. I do not say that this will make men wise. I do not say this will guarantee that the decisions of the Parliament in which paid Members come to decisions shall always be wise decisions, but this I do say that our representative system is imperfect if we cannot be sure of hearing the voice of our people. We cannot be sure of knowing whether the masses have needs, whether they have wishes, whether they have aspirations, so long as any restriction of this kind prevails."

The message of hope to Ireland was in the hands of Sir Edward Grey and Mr Joshua Rowntree, M.P., that of Welsh Disestablishment in those of Mr Thomas E. Ellis, M.P., and Major Evan Jones; the reform of the Government of London in those of Mr James Bryce, M.P., and Mr James Stuart, M.P.; Mr Sydney Buxton moved the resolution upon Free Education, and, at the second session of the Council, Sir George Trevelyan proposed and Mr Samuel Storey, M.P., seconded a strong resolution in favour of Registration and electoral reform.

Then came the consideration of the condition of the Rural population, and the Marquis of Ripon, who spoke with great weight, not only because of his long proved and invaluable statesmanship and his constant readiness to aid at the Federation meetings in the advocacy of advanced reforms, but from his position as a large landowner with intimate knowledge of the rural population of the most important County in England, moved the following resolution in a speech which was filled with the eloquence of conviction and the argument of close knowledge of the subject: "That in the opinion of this Council the well-being of the nation, no less than that of the districts

immediately concerned, requires that the condition of the rural population should receive the immediate attention of Parliament. The Council records with satisfaction the action taken by the General Purposes Committee of the Federation and, while approving generally of the suggestions it has formulated, affirms as of primary importance—

"(*a*) The establishment of District and Parish Councils popularly elected;

"(*b*) The concession of compulsory powers to Local Authorities to acquire and hold land for allotments, small holdings, parish halls, places of worship, labourers' dwellings, and for other public purposes;

"(*c*) The reform of the existing Allotment Acts by the removal of restrictions, by giving security of tenure and the power to erect buildings, and the right of full compensation for all improvements."

The speech was a powerful and truly Radical one. It is impossible for me by quotations to give a fair idea of it but, remembering who the speaker was, it is a refreshment to meet with such a sentence as this: "I have always thought that the withholding from tenants of any kind the full value of their improvements when they left their holdings was a process which ought to be called robbery, and I am not in the slightest degree inclined to allow our rural neighbours to be robbed of their allotments or anything else. Our aim in this policy is to raise our village life, to organize it, to make it more interesting, to render it a valuable training ground for the higher kind of public duties; and it is to secure for this great country a rural population, self-reliant, hopeful, attached to the places of their birth, able to reap the fruits of their education and their enfranchisement in brighter homes, in healthier surroundings, and in a wider life."

Sir Walter Foster, who had devoted a great portion of his political life to this very reform, seconded the resolution, and it was supported by (amongst others) Mr Perks, then the Liberal candi-

date for Louth, and the Rev. W. Tuckwell, the Rector of Stockton, a man of extraordinary eloquence, well known as "the Radical Parson."

MR GLADSTONE'S LAST SPEECH TO THE FEDERATION

But the great interest of the Newcastle meeting centred in our noble Leader. Whenever he drove through the streets, crowds of enthusiastic admirers were there to cheer him. When he left Newcastle his was a triumphal procession of nearly a mile in length, through masses of people who were bent upon showing their devotion and affection to him and to Mrs Gladstone, and the railway station was packed quite inconveniently. The evening meeting was held in the Tyne Theatre which had been specially prepared for the occasion, the great stage being filled by an amphitheatre of seats, holding some 1500 people. There was no standing-room in any part of the great building which was not occupied. The speech was worthy of the occasion. It began with a word of caution, "Whatever your victory may be, with all your intelligence and all your zeal, you will want the additional virtue of patience; for such are the demands of this vast Empire, extended and diversified beyond all precedent in human history, that, without that patience, disappointment and even confusion might be the results of triumph." He then went over, with the utmost rapidity, several subjects upon each of which he had some pregnant words to say: Short Parliaments, Taxation Reform, Foreign politics, Scotch and Welsh Disestablishment, the House of Lords, Registration Reform, Labour politics, Payment of election expenses, Payment of Members, Rural politics, Land Law Reform, and the Eight Hours' movement: and then he came to Ireland, and dealt with the present position of the great controversy which had been going on so long as only he could deal with it; it

was a noble effort. As the beautiful voice of the old man, now eighty-two years of age, rang through the great hall, pointing out the loyal conduct of Ireland under the difficult circumstances of government by coercion, and impressing the fact that the decision of the future was in the hands of the people of this country, there was a breathless silence through the great gathering. "You have arrived at a point decisive in your history and, for the future, if, say after the next Election, this enmity is to continue, it will be the enmity of peoples and not of states. To see one country oppressed by the rulers of another state is heartrending. But, gentlemen, this is not a question of cruel tyrants, this is not a question of selfish oligarchies. Six millions of you by your votes determine the course which the Imperial policy is to follow, and with that power you must accept the duties and the responsibilities which belong to it. If Ireland is oppressed hereafter it will be by you, by the people of this country, and allow me to say that the spectacle of one people oppressing another is a spectacle the saddest, the most heartrending, and perhaps the most revolting, which the wide surface of the earth can present to the human eye."

When, after votes of thanks had been spoken to, Mr and Mrs Gladstone rose to leave the hall, quite suddenly the great audience, as if spontaneously, struck up, "Should auld acquaintance be forgot," and when the grand old veteran turned and faced the meeting, leaning upon his stick, and listening with evident pleasure to the almost overwhelming mass of melody, the scene was one which I, at all events, have never seen equalled for its intense pathos.

Agricultural Conference

In his great speech Mr Gladstone had said that it is among the high and indispensable duties of the Party when it has the necessary power and

influence in Parliament, to proceed with the establishment of District Councils and Parish Councils, and thereby to bring self-government to the very doors of the labouring men throughout the country. This the Liberal Party did. It never slackened in its endeavours until District Councils and Parish Councils were established. Three weeks after the meeting at Newcastle, a circular was addressed by the Secretaries of the Federation to the Liberal Associations of every County constituency of England and Wales; informing them that "in order to further impress the public mind with the importance of the agricultural reforms approved at the recent meeting of the Federation in Newcastle, and to enlist the active sympathies of the inhabitants of the rural districts in those reforms, it is intended to hold a conference in London about the middle of December."

The circular went on to explain the necessity of having genuine representatives, and their expenses being defrayed by the localities making the appointments, and it stated that Mr Gladstone had promised to attend the conference.

A further circular, dated 17th November 1891, gave the detailed arrangements for the proposed meeting which had been fixed for 10th December. It was to meet in the Library of the Memorial Hall, Farringdon Street, and there were to be two Sessions, the first of which was to be devoted to questions of local government, and to commence at two o'clock in the afternoon closing at four, the second, dealing chiefly with the land question, was to begin at five o'clock and close at seven. Between the Sessions tea would be served to the delegates in the large room at the Memorial Hall. The delegates were invited by the Committee to breakfast at half-past nine on the morning of the 11th, at the Holborn Restaurant, when Mr Gladstone would attend and speak.

This circular concluded by impressing once more the fact that "the Conference is not an ordinary

Liberal conference, but one of a special character, and it is therefore necessary that in the selection of delegates, a thorough and *bona fide* representation of the country districts should be aimed at. This would include not only the agricultural labourer, but also the farmer, the village artizan, and others directly or indirectly connected with rural life," and it added that "it is likewise desirable that care should be taken as far as possible to send delegates who can, if required, deal with some special point among the topics for discussion."

The Conference was an unqualified success. With very few exceptions, delegates were nominated by all the English and Welsh County constituencies, and great pains were taken by the Committee of the Federation to ensure that the nominations strictly complied with the conditions laid down as to the character of the delegates to be appointed. Nearly every class and interest was represented. The chair was taken by the President of the Federation; no formal resolutions were submitted, and no arrangements were made for set speeches. A copy of the outlined programme of Rural reforms was given to each delegate, and was to serve as a basis for discussion, and the various points included in it were to be dealt with, as far as possible, one by one. In order to facilitate the business, each delegate on entering the Conference room received a form upon which he could send up to the Chairman his name, etc., and the subject upon which he might wish to speak, and he was requested also to state whether, from his position and the state of political feeling in his district, he preferred that his name should not be made public. After briefly explaining how the conference had been brought about and its definite objects, the Chairman proposed that there should be a time limit of five minutes for each speaker; at four minutes the Chairman, by one stroke of the bell, would inform the speaker that he was approaching the end of his time, and at five minutes upon two

strokes of the bell he would be expected to sit down, and there would be no exception whatever to that rule. When Mr Joseph Arch had broken the ice there was a constant succession of speakers, and perhaps at no other conference was each speech more closely to the point to which the speaker addressed himself. Nine-tenths of the speeches came from delegates themselves, and fifty-eight were made in all. No one who was privileged to be present will forget the quiet, business-like, determined way in which each speaker calmly brought forward the matter which was uppermost in his mind; it was a unique assembly.

Not many of the delegates wished that their names should not be given but, from the position which some of them occupied, it was absolutely necessary that the greatest care should be exercised in this respect. For instance, a rural postman made an important speech upon the state of the cottages in the district with which he was acquainted, a delegate from Hampshire spoke upon school management and the religious intolerance in village schools, but in the great majority of cases the names and addresses were given. It was peculiarly interesting to note the wide difference in the dialects of the speakers, and we were more than ever impressed by the polyglot condition of the English language. Men from Suffolk and Warwick were followed by representatives from Devonshire, Essex, and Yorkshire. We must have heard specimens of nearly all the chief classes of dialects throughout the land. When the meeting had to come to a close at seven o'clock, a number of gentlemen who still wished to speak had to be disappointed.

The next morning the Committee met the delegates at breakfast at the Holborn Restaurant, and again there was a gathering which was quite unique. When the meal was finished, one of the south-country delegates asked the consent of the Chairman to the singing of the Doxology, and never was it united in

with more solemn fervour. Whilst it was being sung Mr and Mrs Gladstone entered the room, and our beloved Chief afterwards referred to the feeling aroused in his mind by hearing the outpouring of this great volume of reverend sound. He said, "One word more. I have spoken of the resolution, moderation, and union, of this meeting. I feel that it possesses one other qualification which I cannot but deem to be among the greatest and best, namely that all its proceedings have been and will be conducted in a spirit of humble dependence upon Almighty God."

It is indeed a privilege of a rare and exquisite kind to be able to look back to such a time and scene as that morning disclosed. The great Statesman, the well-beloved Leader, surrounded by the chosen representatives of the most necessitous of the land, in whom he inspired hope which would not be deferred. His speech was beautiful, powerful and practical. He was on the eve of passing to Italy, the country with which he was so intimately associated, and which itself was so intimately associated with our own country in history and literature, and for the liberty of which he had done so much, and he was assured of the feelings of veneration and respect and of affection felt for him by that great gathering of his followers, and he was told that, "for him and for Mrs Gladstone, to whom they were all under a deep debt of gratitude, the prayers of that meeting and of the great majority of his fellow-countrymen would go forth that he might have that rest and strength which would enable him to return to them invigorated and refreshed to continue those remarkable labours for the good of his country and his countrymen to which he had already devoted his long and glorious life." The scene when Mr Gladstone rose to speak was one of intense enthusiasm. He spoke about "the proceedings of the conference having been signalized throughout by all the features which are the legitimate means and sure precursors

of victory,—I mean by union, by moderation, and by decision," and he then went on to speak of the condition of the rural population, and read a few lines from a stone which had been carved "on the rebuilding of a mill in the park at Hawarden, a stone just like the headstone on a grave, and the inscription beginning thus, 'Trust in God for bread, and to the Government for protection and justice.' This mill was built in the year 1767. Then came the remarkable words, 'Wheat was this year at nine shillings, barley at five and sixpence a bushel. Luxury was at a great height and charity extensive, but the poor were starved, riotous, and hanged.' Now pray bear in mind that this is not meant as an inflammatory description. This mill is a mill close to the house in which we live, belonging to the property. It was meant, I believe, as an honest description of the state of things." And he then went on to trace the alterations which there had been in the condition of the poor agricultural labourers. He said that, "in 1812 there was a bad state of things, a horrible state of things, and no word short of horrible was fit to describe it, but he believed that the bulk of the upper and wealthier classes were in total ignorance of the real condition of the people, and the marvel is that even unconquerable, inexhaustible fortitude and patience kept them silent through such a period, and allowed the whole country to be filled with the vaunts of military glory, and allowed all those who had the means of making known their sentiments to habitually declare that never had there been in the history of England a time so great and grand as that; that our Constitution was the envy of the world and that happy were they who lived within the borders of England. Gentlemen, that was cant."

He went on to show the state of affairs at the time of the repeal of the Corn Laws, and mentioned how a parish doctor in Suffolk had said to him, "I assure you, sir, on the absolute ground of my medical experience and knowledge, that of the whole

labouring population of the parish there is not a man, woman, or child, who has food sufficient for the maintenance of full health." He then went on to point out the reforms which he considered were necessary, dealing specially with Parish Councils and with the embodying in the effective provisions of a Bill of the principle of compulsion in the taking of land. Into this he went very thoroughly, though as he said with great deference and with great humility, because he thought the opinions of those who were in close contact with this class of questions were of far the greatest value, and he ended by saying, "I do believe that we are approaching a period when we may hope to see industry in the rural districts placed in such a position as to give them room and wage enough for a good provision for wife and family, and for the exercise of reasonable forethought, when the circumstances of the labouring man may improve without the least diminution of, but, on the contrary, with the growth of every guarantee for his independence, and that the rural population may sit down under the shadow of beneficent legislation with confidence in the laws and with confidence in the legislature, to live and die in contentment and in peace."

London County Council and General Elections

This gathering was the last of the work of the National Liberal Federation in the year 1891. With the new year the centre of interest was concentrated in London. The first County Council had done much work in spite of the jealously restricted powers allowed by the Local Government Act, 1888. The date fixed for the next election was 5th March, and every effort was made by the Tory Press and the Tory Party to misrepresent the action of the progressive majority on the County Council, and they even went so far as to systematically attack the

character of individual members. This was not merely confined to the rank and file, many of the Leaders of the Tory Party took part in the unjustifiable accusations. It was strongly felt that the whole cause of London Reform was at stake, and the Federation assisted in the great efforts which were made for nearly three weeks, during which public meetings were held every night, and nearly every leader of the Liberal Party spoke. The strenuous efforts were well rewarded for, when the polling day came, the party of re-action received a crushing defeat, and when the General Election came, the reward was further increased by the Parliamentary representation of London being restored to the position which it had held in 1885.

A meeting of Liberal Secretaries and Agents was held on 2nd and 3rd May 1892 for the purpose of comparing notes and relating experiences of Election work, and, in November, the General Committee issued a circular letter calling attention to the figures recorded on each side, and drawing the following comparison. I give this in full because, after the General Election (1906) the Tory Leaders have made a similar comparison but with very different results. Even if they did not manipulate figures avowedly merely "as illustrations," they could scarcely expect to give their rank and file much encouragement from the process.

"In 1886 the Tories and Dissentient Liberals together polled 1,416,472 against 1,338,718 votes recorded in favour of Liberals. In 1892 the total poll of the Tories and Dissentient Liberals was 2,052,339 against 2,277,004 (Liberal). This gives a majority of 224,665 recorded votes in favour of Home Rule, as compared with a majority of 77,754 against it in 1886."

In comment upon this the Committee said :—

"In face of these striking figures, affording as they do abundant proof of the steady growth of public opinion in favour of a policy of justice and con-

ciliation towards Ireland, our opponents profess to believe that the great struggle which has just terminated has not been decisive in its character, and has even resulted in what they are pleased to describe as a moral victory for themselves. It is hardly necessary to deal seriously with pretensions so absurd; but inasmuch as they allege that the majority in the new House of Commons has been given to Mr Gladstone by Irish votes, and that in Great Britain public opinion is decisively hostile to Home Rule, it may be well to point out that the votes given in England, Scotland, and Wales for Home Rule candidates numbered 1,969,494 against 1,971,534 given to Tories and Dissentient Liberals. In other words the electors who voted in the recent contest in Great Britain were almost equally divided between the Home Rulers and non-Home Rulers.

"It is important to note that according to carefully prepared statistics, the 25 Liberals who sit for Metropolitan constituencies represent an average of 7174 votes per seat, and the 32 Tories and Dissentient Liberals who were successful at the poll an average of 6665. In English boroughs the 63 Liberal Members who were returned after a contested election represent an average of 9824 votes as compared with 7212 votes for the 88 'Unionists' returned. In the English Counties the 99 Liberal Members who won contested elections are credited with an average of 9304 votes per seat; the 120 Tories and Dissentient Liberals with 8017."

"In the grand total for the United Kingdom, the Liberal candidates secured 4005 votes each against 3781 recorded for their Tory and Dissentient Liberal opponents.

"It is a source of regret that some seats should have been lost to the Liberal Party by dissensions, and the Committee must again express its feeling that no good can possibly be gained under any circumstances by allowing a Tory to sit for a constituency in reality Liberal."

ANNUAL MEETING, LIVERPOOL, 1893.

No annual meeting of the Federation was held in the year 1892 because of the General Election which occurred about the time when it fell due. It was not until January 1893 that the meeting was held at Liverpool. With the General Election had come the victory of the Liberal Party. The report of the General Committee passed at Liverpool began with the words, "The period that has elapsed since the issue of the last Report of the Committee has been one of the most eventful in the history of the National Liberal Federation." The fight had been a severe one. In 1886 the Tories gained a majority of 114, and this had been turned into a Liberal majority of 40. But the victory was not gained without prolonged and strenuous endeavour, and the man who contributed greatly to it, and who had been of signal service to the Federation since its formation and to the Party generally, the Secretary, Mr Schnadhorst, had to leave the country for a rest of several months, and he never regained the health which he had sacrificed ungrudgingly to the Liberal cause. His then assistant and valuable successor, Mr (now Sir Robert) Hudson, had also been struck down by illness, but the breach was filled by Mr Allard, and the Liverpool meeting passed off with much *éclat*. It was remarkable for size, enthusiasm, and representative character.

But I must make special allusion to the great gladness caused by the victory at the General Election. The Tory Party had presided over the destinies of the country for six years, years which had been lean and barren so far as prosperity of trade and commerce were concerned, and had been to Ireland years of bitter distress and unparalleled coercion. With the victory of the Liberal Party a weight seemed to be lifted off the spirit of the nation. The winter was past and the time of the singing of birds had come, and indeed few things can

the oldest amongst us recall more animating and more agreeable than the way in which at once every reform of an administrative character which was possible was pushed forward. The autumn of 1892 was fruitful in political progress. The operation of the Coercion Act was suspended in Ireland, public meetings were once more permitted in Trafalgar Square, steps were taken to secure the full benefits of past Factory legislation, the qualification necessary for the office of Guardian was reduced to the common unit of £5 rateable value all over the kingdom, a Commission was appointed to inquire into the whole question of poverty in old age, and especially Mr A. H. D. Acland, the Minister of Education, made determined efforts to secure that the benefits of free education should not depend upon the caprices of School Managers, but should be granted in any public elementary school at the request of a parent. But one vast reaching administrative reform was achieved by the appointment of a number of Liberals, and especially working men, upon the Borough Commissions of the Peace. Nearly everywhere throughout the kingdom, however Liberal a part might be, there was a great and unfair preponderance of Tory Magistrates, and the Lord Chancellor spent much time and pains in redressing this unjust inequality in so far as it was practicable.

At the Liverpool meeting a new course was pursued. It was felt that the business would naturally, under the circumstances, not admit of any great novelty; the appeal to the country had practically been upon the Newcastle Programme of reforms, and the country had responded in its favour, so that the main business of the meetings was the emphatic reaffirming of the items which had been carried before, and expressing congratulations upon the results of the elections.

The evening meeting was held in the Philharmonic Hall under the Presidency of Mr Edward Evans, Jr. (now Sir Edward Evans), and Mr Asquith, speaking

for the first time since the Nottingham meeting at a gathering of the Federation, gave an admirable review of the administrative work of the Government during its few months of existence, and touched briefly upon the intended legislation of the coming Session. His peroration was so admirable that I must quote it in full. "The policy of the Liberal Party, gentlemen, though it changes in outward form and embodiment, remains in spirit and intention always the same. Popular government is in our view the best and the only hopeful means by which the organized action of the community can achieve social progress. We listen unmoved to the taunts of those who accuse us of wasting upon the improvement of machinery time and energy which might be more fruitfully given to constructive work. Good work requires good tools, and it is idle to expect equal laws and humane administration so long as your legislature and your Executive are an adulterated impotent expression of the national sentiment. For the last sixty years every step that has been taken to make Parliament more truly representative, and to devolve upon local bodies control of local matters, has been followed by a more than proportionate change for the better in the spirit and in the method in which our laws are made and administered. Never in our history had the State more urgent need to be better equipped, for never did graver and darker problems confront our statesmen. One hundred years ago the greatest of our political writers composed his immortal epitaph upon the age of chivalry. 'The age of chivalry is dead,' and we could not if we would, and we would not if we could, recall the days when the common people formed the dim and unregarded background for the prowess and the pleasures of the few. But, gentlemen, with the widening horizon of interests and opportunities, there is an ever larger field for a noble spirit of adventure. Beyond and beneath the surface of society there are sights—terrible, appalling, and yet inspiring for those who have eyes to see.

The labourer who tills the fields, which are not his own, season after season with patient industry, with no hope for his old age beyond the precarious bounty of public or private charity; the workgirl, old before her time, who lives a life worse than that of a mediæval serf in the squalor of the sweaters' den; the little child who cowers in the cold and the darkness while it listens in terror for the unsteady step which is, to it, the signal of its parent's home-coming; these surely are figures which, if we could only recognise it, are more appalling to the imagination and more stirring to the sense of wrong than any vision that ever inspired Crusader or Knight-errant. While these things remain there is work to be done, there are spurs to be won by every soldier who is enlisted in the army of progress. You and I, who have taken service in its ranks, to-night renew our fealty to that great cause of which justice is the end and freedom the instrument, and with whose fortunes are bound up the best hopes of our Country."

Home Rule Bill

The year 1893 was one of intense political interest. So soon as Parliament met, in February of that year, Mr Gladstone introduced his Home Rule Bill. He had during the winter been working at this constantly and, in spite of his advanced years, the amount of work which he went through was quite astonishing. He was assisted by a Committee of the Cabinet, and every matter was very carefully considered, but especially those which related to finance. I was told by a member of the Committee that to watch Mr Gladstone at work upon financial details was like watching the pulsings of a mighty machine. It is strange to think that the Tory Party seemed quite to overlook the fact that, in this measure, the difficulties of the Irish Question which had hung over English politics for long years, indeed it might almost be said throughout the century, and which had never

been grappled with, but had become more difficult because of their very nebulous character, were brought into a fixed form in which they could be, at all events, intelligently considered. A scheme was presented for grappling with them and reforming them and getting rid of them, and by the mere fact of being so presented, the whole world of politics gained enormously. But it was all in vain so far as the immediate result was concerned. After a fight of eighty-two days in which our great Chief showed a power, a resolution, an earnestness, and an eloquence, which were absolutely beyond praise, as they were beyond precedent, when it is remembered that he had attained the age of eighty-four years, and that the Tories exercised to the most unwarrantable extent all the possible tactics of unscrupulous obstruction, patience and determination carried the day, and the Bill passed its second reading in the House of Commons by a majority of forty-three. Then it was carried through Committee and third reading, but the House of Lords, protesting that in the Representative Chamber the measure had not been adequately discussed, were good enough to give four days to its consideration, and then rejected it by a majority of more than ten to one! No Liberal politician should ever forget that fact. The reckoning day with the Chamber of privilege and abused power will at length come.

The Federation played some part in assisting to gain the victory for Home Rule so far as it was gained. On the 23rd February 1893, a strong circular was issued to the Federated Associations, calling attention to the position of the matter, speaking of the measure introduced into Parliament by Mr Gladstone as comprehensive and statesmanlike, referring to the probable resistance which it would receive from the Opposition, and ending by stating that "our beloved and revered Leader has, by the introduction of this noble example of constructive statesmanship, fulfilled the pledges which the Liberal

Party have made to our sister kingdom, and it is for that Party now to use every exertion to see that the full triumph of the cause of justice and truth is amply insured. The moment so long expected and laboured for has come. This Bill, accepted as it is by the Irish people and approved by the country, offers a golden opportunity for the lasting settlement of a great and historic controversy. We may now at once remove the chief obstacle from the way of pressing reforms, and put the relations between the two countries on a permanent basis of mutual satisfaction and goodwill."

The General Committee of the Federation was summoned to meet at the National Liberal Club on the 10th March. There was a great gathering and strong resolutions in favour of Mr Gladstone's measure were carried, and he and his colleagues were assured of the complete confidence of the Liberal Party throughout the country, and urged not to allow the Opposition, by organized and unscrupulous obstruction, to thwart or delay that Liberal legislation which they were unable to meet or defeat by reason or argument. When the Lords rejected the Home Rule Bill, a manifesto was issued by the Committee of the Federation which probably attracted an amount of public notice which no other Manifesto issued ever did; it bore date the 13th September 1893. It is desirable to set out some portion of this document *in extenso* because, as it said, the rejection of the Home Rule Bill by the House of Lords had bearings so important on our system of Parliamentary Government as to call for very careful consideration by the Federated Liberal Associations.

"For seven years the Home Rule question has been subjected to discussion in the constituencies, fuller and more thorough and more sustained than was ever before given to a Parliamentary proposal. In July of last year Mr Gladstone came into power with a scheme intended to deal with the subject and,

after discussion in the Commons of unprecedented length, the Bill passed its Third reading, being accepted by the popularly elected Chamber as a moderate, comprehensive, and statesmanlike measure, demanded alike in the best interests of Great Britain and Ireland.

"The House of Lords, loud in their protestations that the measure had not been adequately discussed, gave four days to the Bill, and rejected it by a majority of more than ten to one. Seven years' discussion in the country, eighty-two days of consideration in the House of Commons, the definitely ascertained wishes of over two millions of electors, are all to count for nothing when opposed to the views of some four hundred Conservative Peers representing themselves alone, and, for the most part, assembled together merely by virtue of their being sons of their fathers.

"Little more than a year ago the Coercion Ministry appealed to the country and were decisively ejected from office. Will Lord Salisbury and his colleagues, by overriding the verdict which was pronounced against them at the polls, arrogate to themselves the paramount authority in the State? 'The play of various parts of our Constitution,' which Lord Salisbury threatened, has been set in motion, and the permanent Tory majority of the House of Lords is now pitted against the popularly elected majority in the House of Commons. Speaking to the members of the Federation, on the occasion of the great Newcastle meetings two years ago, Mr Gladstone said that 'if Lord Salisbury's threats should be carried out, they (the Lords) will raise up a question which will take precedence of every other question, because on that alone will depend whether this country was or was not a self-governing country, or whether on the contrary there was a power, not upon the Throne or behind the Throne but between the Throne and the people, that could stop the action of the constitutional

machine.' That issue has now been raised, and the question of the mending or ending of the House of Lords, which was subordinate in the Newcastle Programme, must before long, as Mr Gladstone then forecast, displace for a while all other subjects of reform and cry aloud for vigorous and unflinching treatment.

"If the House of Lords is faithful to its traditions and practice it will capitulate; if not, we of the Liberal Party will enter on a fight of which we shall not be afraid."

Then comes a sentence which is very important in connection with the question which had been raised as to whether the country should be appealed to at once, or whether the Parliament which had been elected with so much hope should go forward to carry out some of the reforms which were eagerly looked for from it. The latter was the course which was adopted. The Manifesto said upon this: "We entirely reject the pretension of the Peers to the right to force a dissolution, and we confidently expect the Government to go forward with those reforms for which the country waits. The ingrained dislike of the Upper House to all progressive measures has been exhibited this year, even before the rejection of the Home Rule Bill. How far they will venture to further flout the popular will remains to be seen."

Parish Councils Bill

But it must not be forgotten that the prolonged obstruction of the Home Rule Bill prevented the Government carrying through other pressing legislation. They introduced the Registration of Electors Bill, which was largely discussed in Liberal circles, and was carefully considered in detail by a widely attended meeting of the General Committee, held in the Westminster Town Hall on 19th April 1893. Four important additions to the Bill were suggested

by this meeting, and were in due course laid before the Government, but the Bill had to be withdrawn from the lack of the time necessary for its discussion.

The Government had introduced into the House of Commons the Parish Councils Bill which was a matter of special interest to the Federation, for to that body was largely due the conception of this reform and the fostering of the public interest in the subject which placed the Bill in the forefront of the Ministerial Programme.

ANNUAL MEETING AT PORTSMOUTH

In February 1894, when the Federation held its Annual meeting at Portsmouth, the House of Lords had made many drastic alterations in the Bill as passed by the Commons, and in the Report which was then presented the General Purposes Committee of the Federation expressed the strong and earnest hope that the Ministry and the Liberal majority in the Commons would consider the changes which the Lords had made, resolved to see that no mischievous meddling should detract from the worth of this Charter of reform which the Representative House sought to confer on the rural population.

That Report mentioned several changes which had taken place in the administrative work of the Federation since the previous meeting in 1893. Mr Schnadhorst had resigned the Secretaryship after sixteen years of invaluable work, and Mr R. A. Hudson had been appointed to fill his place. The Liberal Publication Department, which had been of the greatest service during the General Election (when it was presided over by the Right Honourable James Bryce, M.P., and the Right Honourable A. H. D. Acland, M.P.), had now as its Chairman Mr Augustine Birrell, Q.C., M.P., and it had begun the issue of the monthly *Liberal Magazine*.

This venture had an instant success and has gone on steadily increasing in circulation. It was exceed-

ingly interesting to note how many of the speakers at the Annual meetings of the Federation, both at the Council meeting and at the great public meeting, held the *Liberal Magazine* in their hands, and referred to it from time to time for the statistics which they were making use of in their speeches.

The only other part of this report which I shall mention is that which alludes to the administrative work of the Government, and I quote this in full because, never in the history of any Government, was there so immediate an outburst of active and vigorous life in every direction as there was in the administrative departments of the last Government over which Mr Gladstone presided. The report says, "Apart from legislation, including the Home Rule Bill, The Employers' Liability Bill, and the Parish Councils Bill, all passed through the House of Commons, and the Acts for the Regulation of Hours of labour of railway servants, and the Education of Blind and Deaf Children, there has been a vigorous and able administration of the Factory Acts, the appointment of working men as Factory Sub-inspectors and of women as Factory Inspectors, the restoration of Trafalgar Square for the purposes of public meetings, a searching Inquiry into dangerous trades, and the framing of special rules for the preservation of the health of workmen, the appointment of a large number of working-men Magistrates in the Boroughs, the concession of the right of combination to Post Office servants, and the reinstatement of certain postmen and others dismissed under the late Government, the strong and excellent administration of the Free Education Act, and other new departures in the Education Office, the payment of Trade Union wages with Trade Union hours at South Kensington and Bethnal Green, the raising of wages and the shortening of hours in the departments of the War Office with an increase of wages to Admiralty Labourers, the starting of the Labour Department of the Board of Trade and the establishment of the

Labour Gazette, the nomination of sailors to the Local Marine Boards, and many other reforms too numerous to chronicle here. The intervention of the Government in the great Coal Strike of last year is in itself a startling instance of what the new Administrative spirit has produced."

Let me, before proceeding with the account of the Annual Council Meetings at Portsmouth, recall the position of matters in Parliament. After the rejection of the Home Rule Bill by the House of Lords, and the determination of the Government not to obey the mandate of that body and appeal to the country, Mr Gladstone, old as he was, still meant business. The House adjourned for a short recess on 21st September 1893, met again on 2nd November and sat up to 5th March 1894. After persistent and ridiculous obstruction led by Mr Balfour and Mr Chamberlain, the Parish Councils Bill had been carried through the Commons, and, when the Federation met, that measure had, as I have already mentioned, been returned by the Lords in a much mutilated condition. The spirit of the meeting at Portsmouth was one of calm and stern determination not to brook the interference of the non-representative House. This was the keynote struck at the very opening of the meeting, and it was splendidly resounded by Mr Acland in the words, "As the House of Commons stood face to face with the House of Lords, the question they asked was this, Were they, when under the Liberal Government, a self-governing people, or were they not? They had watched the proceedings of the House of Lords in reference to the Local Government Bill, and he thought all Liberals had made up their minds what was their immediate duty. So had the Government. The other parts of the Constitution had been brought into play, and as to the more important amendments by the Lords, the Government called them not amendments but destruction. The Government's course was clear, and he knew that meeting would

approve it. They would negative all those amendments." The approval of the meeting was shown by enthusiastic and tumultuous applause; a real weight had been lifted from the spirits of the great gathering.

This question of the attitude of the House of Lords was the ruling topic at all the meetings of the Council. Mr Birrell moved a resolution of confidence in the Government, and of determination that the Bills which had passed the House of Commons should become law notwithstanding the opposition of the House of Lords.

Mr W. S. Robson, Q.C. (now Sir W. S. Robson, K.C., and Solicitor-General), moved and Mr E. J. C. Morton, M.P., seconded, "That the habitual disregard of the national will manifested by the House of Lords in delaying, mutilating, and rejecting measures demanded by the country and approved by the House of Commons, is an intolerable abuse of the powers possessed by the hereditary and non-representative Chamber, and that the Ministry may be assured of the enthusiastic and strenuous support of the Liberal Party in whatever measure it takes to secure that the House of Commons shall be the paramount authority in the State." The mover welcomed the prospect of a conflict with the hereditary foes of the Liberal Party. "All they asked and they asked it respectfully but emphatically was to be allowed to fight it right out once for all. They did not desire to be placed in array as for battle, only to find that their enemies had lowered their flag and were to be permitted to retire, smiling from the field, with undiminished power of mischief for all future occasions. They had had enough of such as that, victories of that sort had ceased to be glorious. He believed he echoed the universal feeling of Liberalism when he said that they wanted no surrender, and that they would accept no surrender from the Lords which did not involve the loss of their veto upon legislation."

Mr Morton denounced especially the Bench of Bishops, "which had uniformly been the strongest

supporter of every war that had desolated Europe, of every tyranny that had ground the faces of the poor, and of every infamy (such as slavery) that had disgraced the name of England." Every sentence of those speeches evoked torrents of applause, and, at the great evening meeting in the Drill Hall, which was crowded to its utmost capacity by an audience of some 6000 persons, Sir William Harcourt drove home with unrivalled force the great fact, "that it is not upon one question, or upon two questions, or upon three questions, but upon all questions, that the House of Lords is the champion of all abuses and the enemy of all reform." He also spoke of the conduct of the Bishops in connection with the Parish Councils Bill: "They have throughout been amongst the most militant and aggressive antagonists of popular rights." He quoted Lord Hartington's saying that, "a contest between the House of Lords and the House of Commons is not an equal contest. The House of Commons, strong in its representative character, strong in the support of the great masses of the people, and strong in the undivided and indisputable control it possesses over the resources of the country, is more than a match for its opponents in this contest." Sir William Harcourt's speech was received with the greatest enthusiasm. The mover of the vote of thanks to him said that, "There was no mistaking the temper of this meeting, there had been no mistaking the temper of all those meetings, in which they had reaffirmed every item of the Newcastle Programme. They meant everything they had said. They were not as the Tories imagined playing at these things, they were part of their lives. There was one question the place of which in the Newcastle Programme they had indeed altered, and the wording of which they had altered. They knew the question which had been forced to the front. Those of them who were old in political fighting rejoiced that it was now to the front. Not boastfully, but with a full knowledge of all the difficulties that lay before them

they took this matter up. To-morrow those of them who came from a distance would leave the beautiful town of Portsmouth, having gained much there. Those of them who came from the far North had learned that the people of the South were one with them in true and earnest Radical faith. They would carry with them into every corner of this land that watchword which would ring through it until at length, by being actually carried into effect and by that alone, it was silenced, 'No veto for the House of Lords.'"

As we walked away from this meeting even the oldest among us was filled with strong hope that the question which had been with us since our earliest political days was at length to be fought out. It was not so in fact; nothing is ever as we hope or fear. The Lords were wise in time. The Government redeemed their promises, every amendment which the House of Lords proposed was rejected, and that body once more ate humble pie, and were for the moment forgiven, but only for the moment. Their opposition to the Parish Councils Bill hastened the digging of the grave of their power, and, in spite of the flashes of something almost suggesting life which from time to time break from them, their power to pass, without discussion, every evil measure proposed by a Tory Government, and to thwart, obstruct, and mutilate every good measure proposed by a Liberal Government, is rapidly approaching its end.

Mr Gladstone's Retirement

After this victory over the House of Lords our gallant aged leader, Mr Gladstone, laid down the weapons which he had wielded so long and with such marvellous power, weapons which no other man has ever been able to lift. As his parting word to the Liberal Members of the House of Commons, and indeed to the Liberal Party, he left the problem of the House of Lords with us for solution.

He spoke of the differences of conviction, prepossession, mental habit, and fundamental tendency, between the House of Lords and the House of Commons; and then he said, "They appeared to have reached a development in the present year such as to create a state of things of which we were compelled to say that, in our judgment 'it cannot continue.' Sir, I do not wish to say hard words which are easily employed and as easily retorted; it is a game that two can play at, but without using hard words, without presuming to judge of motives, without desiring or venturing to allege imputations, I have felt it a duty to state what appear to me to be indisputable facts. The issue which is raised between an Assembly elected by the votes of more than six million people and a deliberative Assembly occupied by many men of virtue, by many men of talent, of course with considerable diversities and varieties, is a controversy which once raised must go forward to its issue."

Mr Gladstone retired on March 4th, 1894, from office and from the Leadership of the Party so quietly that the immediate effect was almost startlingly small. It was like the man to take this step, which was to us of such supreme importance, with so much consideration, so much thoughtfulness, such care for those who were to come after him, that, for the moment, it almost seemed as if the vast change made but slight difference. But there were not a few of his old and trusted followers who felt from the very first that, in a very true sense, the light and brightness of their political lives were at an end, and there has never been a time during the eleven years which have elapsed when there has been "doubt, hesitation or pain" in our political relations, when the needs of the great country of which we are citizens have seemed to be more pressing than usual, and the dangers of false teachers and false doctrine more accentuated, without a widely expressed desire and yet wider longing for the "touch of a vanished hand and the sound of a voice that is still."

The meetings at Portsmouth came to a close on the 14th February, and, on the 1st March, Mr Gladstone made his last speech in the House of Commons. On the 5th March a largely attended meeting of the Party was held at which, without much apparent difference of opinion, Lord Rosebery was called upon to succeed Mr Gladstone as Prime Minister, and that day the officers of the Federation issued a Manifesto to the Liberal Associations of the kingdom calling attention to the facts, stating (amongst other things) that Mr Gladstone was present at the meeting in 1877 when this "organization was founded, and his interest in the work of the Federation has been frequently manifested by his attendance at our meetings and in many other ways. His transcendent ability, unique experience of affairs, chivalrous courtesy towards opponents, intense earnestness of purpose and lofty personal character, tend to make him the foremost figure in political life and the greatest Statesman of our age. We who for so many years have been proud to follow him, and who regard him with a devoted affection and respect such as no political leader has before inspired, realise clearly how impossible it will be to adequately fill the vacant place." It went to speak of the Ministry which he left behind, which was composed of strong and earnest men, and could be trusted to conduct the affairs of the Empire with dignity and success, and it concluded with the words, "We must not overlook the fact that the enemy will endeavour to propagate the belief that the power and cohesion of the Liberal Party cannot be maintained under the altered circumstances. They forget that principles do not perish with persons, that however great the worker the work is greater, and that the cause remains though the Leader is changed. The complete carrying out of the programme to which the Party and its Leaders are alike pledged must neither be imperilled nor delayed. The time of difficulty is no time for doubt or difference. Not only have we

earnest work in hand, but the future will assuredly bring us other labours possibly more arduous than any we have known. Through a long life of strenuous warfare our great Leader has led us to many a democratic victory. If we are only courageous and united, true to our principles and animated still by his noble example, there are other victories waiting us signal and assured."

An Address was also drawn up by the Committee for presentation to Mr Gladstone, and it was signed by the Presidents of the whole of the Federated Associations. It is unnecessary to set out this address at any length. It spoke of the admiration of the whole of the people of Great Britain and Ireland, of the transcendent ability which he had devoted through the greater part of the century to their service, and the especial aid that he had given to the Federation, and it concluded, "We have had the inspiring effect of your frequent presence amongst us; the schedule of reforms which press for solution, and which has been styled the Newcastle Programme, largely gained its definite character and prompt acceptance by your powerful endorsement of it at one of our greatest meetings. The movement for extending local self-government to the Rural Districts received much of the impetus which has crowned it, amongst the host of successes won under your Leadership, from your presence amongst the Representatives gathered together by the Federation from all parts of the country in December 1891. It is impossible to exaggerate the extent to which the cause of Ireland, which you have made for ever your own, has gained from the stirring, strengthening, and stimulating speeches by which you have rendered so many of our great gatherings in the noblest sense historical. We shall not enlarge upon the abiding sorrow with which we receive the intelligence of your retirement. We trust that you may be spared to aid our country for years to come by your unique experience and invaluable counsel, and we believe that

your heart will be gladdened by the knowledge that the thought of your devotion and earnestness, the memory of your words, and the noble example of your life, remain and bear good fruit in the direction which you most desired."

In response to this address the President of the Federation received the following letter from Mr Gladstone:—

"DEAR DR SPENCE WATSON,—I acknowledge with gratitude no less than with pleasure the remarkable address in which the National Liberal Federation has been pleased to express its sentiments on the subject of my retirement from the office of Prime Minister at a very advanced age.

"As I find the signature to this document properly headed by your weighty name, I will make no apology for addressing you, on your own behalf, and that of your signatories, the present acknowledgment.

"I find in this address a lucid exposition of what has been accomplished during my political lifetime in the way of political progress through the action of our institutions; and I need not do more than take passing notice of the fact that, whilst the picture is a just one as regards the action of the nation and the Liberal Party, only a very small and insignificant fraction of the accomplished results can be ascribed, even by a favourable judge, personally to myself. Concurrence to the best of my limited ability is all I can claim. Subject to this observation I conceive that the facts of my Parliamentary history during the nineteenth century are such as will obtain conspicuous notice on the page of history.

"It is not for me to enter upon the doubly interesting prospects of the future which lies before us; but I will express my earnest hope that it may be marked by the same practical tone, the same union of firmness with moderation, the same regard for individual freedom, the same desire to harmonise the

old with the new, and the same sound principles generally of policy and administration, which have given the work of past years so much promise of stability.—I remain, dear Dr Spence Watson, with sincere respect, ever faithfully yours,

"W. E. GLADSTONE.

"You will readily understand that this acknowledgment has been postponed in consequence of the operation recently required by the state of my vision."

Mr Gladstone's loss was in very truth irreparable, but it was certain that his heroic spirit would continue to animate the Party which he had led so long, and it still does so.

LEEDS CONFERENCE ON HOUSE OF LORDS

The first proof of this was a special conference convened by the General Purposes Committee to be held at Leeds on 20th June 1894, at which the general attitude of the rank and file of Liberalism towards the House of Lords should be fully discussed and finally decided. The circular calling this conference was issued on the 15th May, and it was mentioned that it would occupy the whole day and, as far as compatible with the time at their disposal, the Committee of the Federation would seek to elicit the fullest and freest expression of opinion from those present, and the different Associations were specially asked to see that, in the appointment of delegates, no interest was overlooked, so that the Conference might truly claim to represent every section of the Party. This gathering was an unprecedented success. The demand for tickets of admission for the appointed representatives was so great that some of those who had been appointed were unable to procure admission, although the Conference was actually attended by 1890 delegates representing 347 English and Welsh constituencies.

The proceedings were of remarkable interest, the number and character of the speakers and the wide

area which they represented showed convincingly the strong hold which the subject had upon Liberal politicians. Sir Wemyss Reid wrote: "No better or fuller representation of English Liberalism was ever brought together within four walls than that which met in the Albert Hall at Leeds under the presidency of Dr Spence Watson." The first resolution was moved by the President from the Chair, and was seconded by Mr Edward Harford (the General Secretary of the Amalgamated Society of Railway Servants), and supported by Mr Ellis J. Griffith (now M.P.) and Mr J. T. Woodhouse (now Sir James Woodhouse, M.P.), the Chairman of the Howdenshire Division of Yorkshire Liberal Association. It was, "That the power now exercised by the House of Lords to mutilate and reject legislative measures passed by the elected representatives of the people in the House of Commons has been systematically used to defeat reforms, is inconsistent with the right of free and popular self-government, and should cease to exist." Each of the speakers dealt with one of the points raised by this resolution: the attitude of the House of Lords, first, to constitutional and social reforms; second, to labour; third, to religious equality; fourth, to land.

The second resolution was proposed by Mr (now Sir) W. S. Robson, Q.C., and seconded by Mr Joseph Rowntree, the President of the York Liberal Association. It was, "That this meeting therefore calls upon the Government to introduce a measure for the abolition of the House of Lords' veto by providing that, whenever a Bill passed by the House of Commons shall be altered or rejected by the House of Lords, such Bill may be reaffirmed by the House of Commons with or without such alteration, and, subject only to the Royal Assent, shall thereupon become law."

Mr Henry Labouchere, M.P., moved, and Sir Wilfred Lawson, M.P., seconded the following amendment to this resolution: "That this meeting is of opinion that the House of Lords is useless, dangerous, and ought to be abolished, and with this object in view calls upon the Government to introduce a

measure for the abolition of the House of Lords' veto in the present Session by providing that, whenever a Bill passed by the House of Commons shall be altered or rejected in the House of Lords, such Bill may be reaffirmed by the House of Commons with or without such alteration, in the same Session or in the same Parliament, and subject only to the Royal Assent, shall thereupon become law."

Then followed a long and interesting discussion in which as many as eighteen speakers took part. A vote was at length taken upon the amendment, which was lost by an overwhelming majority, certainly not less than nine or ten to one. A great number of amendments had been handed to the Chairman, but, on his suggestion, the Conference decided that Mr Labouchere's amendment had practically raised the whole issue, and accordingly determined to vote upon the question at once. The resolution had been amended by the insertion of the words, after the word "introduce," "as soon as practicable during the present Parliament," and also after the words, "may be reaffirmed by the House of Commons," the addition of "at any time in the same Session or the same Parliament." The resolution as amended was put and carried amidst great enthusiasm, with only one dissentient, and then Mr B. F. C. Costello, of the London Liberal and Radical Union, and Professor Anthony, of the Plymouth Liberal Association, moved and seconded the third resolution, "That this meeting assures the Government of the resolute support of the Liberal Party in any steps which may be deemed necessary to enforce the passage into law of this great constitutional reform."

No one who attended this conference could fail to leave it deeply impressed by the strength and earnestness of the determination and conviction amongst the politicians of the Liberal Party that the position of the House of Lords in our Constitution had become an absolute impossibility and must be dealt with in a thoroughly radical way. At the

same time, perhaps, we somewhat overlooked the fact that the great gathering of representatives from all parts of the country consisted of men who were before everything politicians, and that, whilst the question had taken amongst them so prominent a place, the great mass of the rank and file of the Party might possibly, and, as it proved, did certainly require some more immediate and intense ground of offence with the long-established second house before they took part in such an agitation as would carry whatever reform was required.

The resolutions of the Conference were practically accepted by Lord Rosebery and his colleagues, and the report which was presented to the next annual meeting of the Federation (which was held at Cardiff) stated that, whilst Lord Rosebery on behalf of the Government had announced that the first step against the Lords would be taken by resolution and not by Bill, as suggested at the Conference, the salient feature was that he and his colleagues had pledged themselves in clear and unmistakable terms to leave no stone unturned to effect the object aimed at by the Leeds Conference, namely, to get rid for ever of the present power of the Peers to shelve, mutilate, or reject measures which had received the sanction of the Representative Chamber.

Although the Parliament of 1892 came to an end without our Leaders having found it practicable to take any step actually to forward the Party's desire, the question of the House of Lords was only postponed, and its solution is still the most pressing of all political problems. Its position at the present time is more disgraceful than ever. It has been the patient lackey of the Tory Government, even aiding and abetting it in most despicable attacks upon well-recognised constitutional principles, the worst of which was engineered by the political representatives of the State Church and connived at by the Government. It is ever becoming plainer that it will be impossible for a Liberal Government, which

is not content to exist upon the barest sufferance of an irresponsible Chamber, to carry forward the work of the country until it has obtained the absolutely necessary reform. Whatever the cost may be, even if necessary by the refusal of supply, it will be the duty and the imperative duty of any Liberal Government to finally put an end to the intolerable practices of the non-representative chamber when the Party of which it is practically composed is in a minority in the Representative House, and, since this was written, it is in a great minority.

PARISH COUNCILS ACT MEETINGS

The year 1894 was one of peculiar activity for the Federation. The Parish Councils Act having been passed into law, it became evident at once that its usefulness would depend largely upon its being thoroughly understood, and upon those who were chiefly affected by it themselves taking advantage of its provisions. The Federation therefore arranged for a number of Conferences to be held in the summer and autumn at various centres so as to cover the whole of England, and at these the Act was explained by some speaker who was conversant with its details, and questions were then invited from the audience. On one occasion no fewer than 125 questions upon points of practice in the actual working of the Act were sent up to the Chair. Most of the meetings were addressed by a member of the Government. At eight of the Conferences Mr Corrie Grant was the principal speaker. He not only wrote a Parish Councillor's handbook, (which the Liberal Publication Department printed and sold, more than 40,000 copies being purchased,) but in it he offered to reply to any written questions which might be asked him and, in response to this offer, he had communications from more than 6000 correspondents, many of whom required information upon different branches of the subject.

Equalisation of Death Duties

But whilst the legislation which the Liberal Party succeeded in passing through in this year was of such great importance, especially to working men, that even so stalwart an opponent as Mr Chamberlain was compelled to say in the House of Commons that, "in the history of our legislation for the last twenty years, no Parliament could be found in which more had been done as to the importance of the Bills which had been passed, and that this statement was not an expression of his personal opinion but a matter of fact," the most important achievement fell to Sir William Harcourt. He, by his invaluable Budget, placed land in the same position as other property by the equalisation of the death duties. In spite of the bitter opposition which this aroused from the Tory Party, no Tory Chancellor of the Exchequer who has held office subsequently would deny the enormous value of the step which was thus taken. Fortunately the Bishops had not yet shown the House of Lords how, by a miserable subterfuge, that House may possibly succeed in interfering with the financial questions which have so long been the province of the Commons alone. It requires a Tory Government to be in power, and in connivance with the Spiritual Peers, to make such practices fully successful. Still Satan found sufficient mischief for the idle hands of the Peers Temporal and Spiritual, who destroyed the Employers' Liability Bill, rejected the Evicted Tenants Bill, and seriously mutilated the Scotch Local Government Act.

Mr Schnadhorst's Retirement

This year, 1894, the Annual meeting of the General Committee was held at Newcastle-upon-Tyne, and the first business was the expression of the profound regret of that body to learn that Mr Schnadhorst, who had been the invaluable Secretary of the Federa-

tion for sixteen years, and Chairman of the Committee for the last twelve months, had been compelled by ill-health to resign the office. He had brought with him to the service of the Federation not merely zeal and knowledge, but an unrivalled power of organization and a remarkable gift for dealing tactfully with involved situations, and, generally, with men. He was a man in whom the different Liberal organizations, and indeed all Liberals, from the Leaders to the rank and file of the Party, placed the utmost confidence. They had absolute reliance in his calm and wise judgment, he was a prince of organizers, and he had in addition a peculiar faculty of being able to see what men would be of service to the Party, and under his wise guidance he brought forward and trained and educated in political work many men who fulfilled admirable functions in later life. The Federation was especially happy and fortunate in having so admirable an understudy as Mr Hudson to take his place. He was one of those who was brought up under Mr Schnadhorst, and he had the advantage of receiving his political education from him. Long may the Federation continue to enjoy his invaluable services.

At this meeting, Mr Schnadhorst having retired from the position of Chairman of the General Committee, and Mr (now Sir) Edward Evans, Jr., was unanimously elected to the post, which he has held since with great advantage to the Federation. I have already mentioned the work which was done this year by the Liberal Publication Department in the matter of the Parish Councils Act, but the volume of the general business which it transacted in 1894 was greater than that of any previous year of its existence, even taking those in which a General Election had been held into the comparison. It had indeed so greatly extended its operations that we had to find larger and more convenient premises for it. The *Liberal Magazine* had also to increase in size, and it had become almost a necessity for Liberal speakers. It still pursues its great career of usefulness. In this

year alone the total sales of leaflets, pamphlets and booklets amounted to over five millions, and the Committee expressed the indebtedness which they have always felt and have generally alluded to Mr Birrell for his invaluable assistance as Chairman of the Department, to Mr Hudson for his help as Honorary Secretary, and to Mr Geake, whose services to the Party in editing the *Liberal Magazine*, and in supervising the general publications of the Department have been of the highest value.

In spite of the constant opposition of the House of Lords I have pointed out that the legislation of 1894 was such as the Liberal Party might well congratulate itself upon, but the administrative reforms which Liberal Ministers had achieved in their respective departments were of extraordinary importance and were a fitting succession to those which I have already specified for 1893. It is quite surprising to see the number of these which especially affected the health, the occupations, the hours of labour, and the wages of working men. But no mention of administrative reform would be complete without a special word relating to Mr John Morley's work at the Irish Office. As the Report said, "The task of governing Ireland under present conditions is perhaps the most difficult and arduous that can fall to the lot of an English Statesman, and it is not too much to say that Mr Morley has succeeded to an extent which no other man could have done without resorting to exceptional legislation. Relying instead on the provisions of the ordinary general law, the present Chief Secretary has the satisfaction of seeing Ireland less disturbed this winter than it has been at any period within the past seventeen years. The thanks of Englishmen and Irishmen alike are due to Mr Morley for the manner in which he has overcome the difficulties of his office, difficulties which are bound to exist so long as the Irish people are excluded from all share in the work of administering Irish affairs."

When I spoke of the legislative measures success-

fully carried by this Liberal Government, it must never be forgotten that the majority which it had at its disposal was exceedingly small, whilst the minority was unusually large, and had the sense that behind it, it had not only the partisanship but the active confederacy of the House of Lords.

ANNUAL MEETING, CARDIFF, 1895

The Annual meeting of the Council of the Federation was held in January 1895 at Cardiff. It was the first visit of the Federation to Wales for its Annual Gathering, the attendance was of a most representative character, and the cordiality with which the Federation was received and entertained left the pleasantest recollections, and stamped the gathering as one of the most successful yet held.

As was natural, considering the place of meeting and the time, the prominent question at this gathering was the Disestablishment and Disendowment of the Church of England in Wales, but the position of the House of Lords also received much attention. The magnificent conference held at Leeds was constantly referred to, and the way in which the Government through Lord Rosebery had risen to the occasion was hailed with satisfaction. He had declared, in terms as plain as the English language was capable of, that he and the Government would have no part in doing anything that would have for its object the strengthening of the House of Lords. The Committee further declared that the whole power of the Government would be given to obtaining a clear and emphatic resolution that, in all matters, the will of the House of Commons, the will of the people's House and the Representative House, should be paramount, and it rested upon each and every one of those present at the Conference to see to it that the declaration met with so emphatic an endorsement that it should become a living and irresistible force. This we must always keep before us. Until we have come to death

grips with that intolerable anomaly, and have conquered it once and for all, the position of the Liberal Party must be one of a precarious nature and of the utmost difficulty.

On the first day of the Conference Mr Bryce addressed the meeting in a speech of great interest and ability, dealing with the whole of the political situation of the time, and especially treating of the two important subjects which were always most prominent at the gathering: Religious Equality and the House of Lords. He pointed out with great force the constant trouble which that House had been to Liberals, and that the main issue which was to be decided was to vindicate the rights of the people, to vindicate them against prejudice, against self-interest, and against the supercilious arrogance of an irresponsible House.

At the second Session of the Council, Sir George Osborne Morgan, Bart., M.P., moved the following resolution on Welsh Disestablishment: "That this Council having repeatedly declared itself in favour of the Disestablishment and Disendowment of the Church of England in Wales, and of the application of the tithes to the public purposes of the Principality, heartily welcomes the Prime Minister's declaration that a Welsh Disestablishment Bill is now the first Government measure to be brought forward in Parliament, and rejoices to believe that this Bill will be sent up to the House of Lords during the coming Session." He warned his hearers not to commit the great mistake of undervaluing the strength of their opponents; they were fighting against principalities and powers, against vested interests which had struck their roots deep down into the social and political life of the country.

Mr R. W. Perks, M.P., seconded the resolution as an English Nonconformist.

Perhaps the most interesting of the business was the consideration of Labour legislation and administration, which was moved by Mr William

Abraham, M.P., and seconded by Mr W. C. Steadman, who was then the Liberal candidate for Hammersmith, and supported by Lord Brassey. It is important as showing how, in the opinion of men who are undoubtedly foremost amongst the representatives of labour, the work of the last Liberal Government was looked upon with the highest favour. It ran, "That this Council expresses its profound regret that, owing to the action of the House of Lords, the wage earners of this country have been deprived of the benefit of the Employers' Liability Bill, a measure asked for by the Trade Unions of the Kingdom and urgently required in the interests of the health and safety of the working classes. The Council hopes to see this measure placed on the Statute book, together with such amendments of the laws relating to factories, workshops and mines, as the growing social needs of the community demand, and believes that the Government, by these legislative efforts and by the continuance of its administrative efficiency, is proving itself to be in full sympathy with the best aspirations of the democracy."

WELSH DISESTABLISHMENT

The Marquis of Bute had made difficulties as to the great public meeting of the Federation in Cardiff, so that it had become necessary to erect a hall specially for the occasion, and this was done at the Canton Market. It was a splendid hall for the occasion, holding more than 10,000 people, and its capacity was taxed to its utmost extent. The huge galleries spread on each side from the centre of the area (which was filled by the general public) to the top of the roof. In the great south gallery the whole of the delegates were seated, whilst the side galleries were filled by 2000 numbered and reserved chairs. The whole place, including the speakers' platform, was packed to overflowing. The fittings and decorations, with a lining of red cloth round the walls of

the building, gave a warmth to the appearance of the structure which is rarely to be found in an erection of this character. The services of some three hundred volunteer stewards were requisitioned, and the ease with which the building was filled, and the promptitude with which the ticket-holder was conducted to his allotted place, were noteworthy features of the great gathering. Lord Rosebery, in a powerful speech of nearly an hour and a half, dealt chiefly with the question of Disestablishment and Disendowment, not only in Wales but also in Scotland. It was a remarkable effort, and there were passages in it of much eloquence. In speaking of the essence of a Church he said, in a way which carried the conviction of deep earnestness to every heart, "To contend that material supplies, or the privilege of seats in the House of Lords, are necessary to the life and the vigour of a Church, is to make a fatal confusion between the essence and the incidents of a Church. The essence of a Church is spiritual; the inspiration, the tradition, the gracious message, the Divine mission, the faith that guides us through the mystery of life to the mystery of death, all these were produced in poverty, in a manger, in the cot of the carpenter; they flourished under persecution, nothing can be so remote from their essence and their spirit as the wealth or power or dignities of this world. Establishment and endowment at most represent the gifts of the laity to the Temple, the ornaments, the rich essences, the corn and wine and oil which depend for their merit on the willingness and enthusiasm of the offerers, but which lose all value and all significance when they are wrung out against the will of the people."

In speaking of the barriers which opposed themselves to the wishes of the Welsh people in respect to Welsh Disestablishment, he alluded to the attitude of the House of Lords. He had already said, towards the beginning of his speech, "We have entered upon a long-foreseen and inevitable campaign, a campaign

which has been coming nearer to us day by day and year by year, until we can no longer honourably avoid it; I mean the campaign against the House of Lords. That campaign alone would tax the energies of the Liberal Party at its best, because it cannot fail to be long, it cannot fail to be arduous, and you will need all your energies to surmount the difficulties which it involves. This then is our position as regards objects. What is our position as regards means? Remember, gentlemen, that very few measures of the first class can be carried through in a single Session even by a Tory Government. Well, you laugh, but a Tory Government has in one way much greater facilities for the business of legislation than we have, because, whereas we have to deal with two Chambers, one of which is permanently hostile, the Tory Government has only got to deal with one. That being the case we have to consider whether, with the barrier of the House of Lords permanently placed against Liberal legislation, we shall give the House of Commons an opportunity of passing Liberal measures though certain that they must meet with disaster elsewhere, or whether we shall bow our neck to the yoke of the House of Lords and therefore introduce those Bills which we think their Lordships are likely to pass." Here there were cries of "Never." "Gentlemen," Lord Rosebery said, "it is a very easy thing to say 'Never,' but, if you do not consult the susceptibilities and the attitude of the House of Lords, the Liberal Government stands a very good chance of ending its Session as a barren Session, and that, in my opinion, is one of the intolerable disabilities and one of the intolerable degradations which make our campaign against the House of Lords inevitable." He now said, when approaching the conclusion of his speech, "So long as things are as at present, the cause on which you have set your heart has no chance of passing the House of Lords. It would be rejected by the House of Lords by a majority of exactly the same proportion as that by which your

Welsh representatives would pass it if it were left to them. Well, Gentlemen, the House of Lords is indeed the supreme question of the hour, and all that I will say upon it to-night is this, it is the supreme question of the hour because it covers and underlies simultaneously so many of the questions in which you are interested. All that I will say on it to-night is this, that, as treated by our opponents, it is a mysterious question. When it was first raised the House of Lords was a sacred institution on behalf of which they were prepared to shed the last drop of their blood. But the gyrations of the Tory Party on that question have since been very remarkable. The Constitution of the House of Lords is now universally allowed to be faulty and defective, while, at the same time, it is described as a necessary bulwark of property, and the last observation is that it is a necessary bulwark for the defence of popular rights. Yes, gentlemen, its latest apologist, and a very intelligent man he is, Professor Albert Dicey, calls it "the protector of the rights of the nation." Besides that, its function, as it seems, is to test the mandates that are given to the Liberal Party by the country, and to refer all Liberal Bills and, if possible all Liberal Members, back to the constituencies that returned them. I have not, I believe, exhausted all its functions, but these have become in the course of discussions so multifarious and so remarkable, that I am sometimes beginning to wonder where these functions begin and where they end. And, but I must warn you here that I am speaking ironically, I am sometimes led to wonder if it is not the House of Commons that really ought to be done away with."

Those wise and weighty words lay bare the wretched unfairness of the House of Lords. All men see how they reject or mutilate Liberal measures and pass Tory measures with avidity, but all men do not see that every Liberal measure must be framed with direct reference to the fact that the Tory Chamber possesses an absolute and unrestrained

veto upon measures which are passed by the representatives of the people. This fact alone emasculates the whole of our legislation.

At the beginning of the year which followed the meeting at Cardiff, it was an ordinary Tory prophecy that the ministry would not outlive the address, and, as a matter of fact, the Government was attacked with persistent and rancorous hostility, but the assaults were in all cases successfully resisted. Indeed this debate on the address, which, on account of the defection of the Parnellites, the Liberals had viewed with some amount of anxiety, had practically given the Government three votes of confidence. The Irish Land Bill was read a second time, the Liquor Traffic Control Bill and the Plural Voting Bill were read a first time. The Welsh Disestablishment Bill was carried, on its second reading, by a majority of 44, and made considerable progress in Committee.

Snatch Defeat of Government

But, in June 1895, the unexpected happened. Sir Henry Campbell-Bannerman had announced the approaching retirement of the Duke of Cambridge from the Commandership in Chief, a most important matter which our present Leader had himself brought about, and he had promised the introduction of an important scheme of Army Reforms. Suddenly Mr Brodrick appeared to have discovered that there was a deficiency in the stores of cordite. It was not true, but it was sufficient for a Tory member. It affected the honour of the Secretary for War. A snatch division was at once taken upon it, Mr Balfour lending himself, in an unprecedented manner, to the base and baseless attack upon an able and popular minister, although he was compelled to own almost immediately afterwards that, under that true statesmanship and guidance, the Army of Great Britain was never a better fighting machine than at that

moment; the bitterest of satires upon his own conduct. The Government was defeated and at once resigned. Lord Salisbury was sent for and formed a ministry, and after a short time spent in winding up the business of the Session, Parliament was dissolved on 8th July.

The Officers of the Federation at once issued a circular calling to the remembrance of the Federated Associations the remarkable series of legislative and administrative triumphs by which the Liberal ministry had amply justified its title to be considered the most thorough and most progressive, as well as the most energetic and business-like Government which they had yet seen. This circular pointed out that whichever Department of State was taken into consideration, the verdict of history would assuredly be that its duties had been worthily fulfilled. The work which had been done had been of great and enduring benefit to every class of the community. An enormous step forward had been taken in meeting the just claims of Labour. Humane and practical administration of existing laws, and resolute reforms in a multitude of directions, had given fresh life to the conduct of home affairs. Every branch of our educational system had been handled with unprecedented skill and science. The National Defences had been placed upon a sound and satisfactory footing. The Colonies had received that care and attention which their Imperial importance demanded. The great Empire of India had received more sympathetic consideration from the mother country. The wise guidance of Foreign Affairs had extorted the unwilling approbation of our opponents and won the admiration of Europe. Ireland had been admirably governed without resort to exceptional legislation. The internecine strife, which had from time to time threatened to paralyse the commercial prosperity of the kingdom, had, by judicious and friendly intervention, been largely lessened. Local self-government, the safeguard of popular liberty, had been extended

to every Parish in the land. The incidence of taxation had been largely re-adjusted, and the wealthy portion of the community had had a fairer portion of the burden of the State laid upon it. Both in legislation and in administration, the Government had proved the mighty difference between the halting and unwilling optional measures of Conservatism and the searching, far-reaching reforms of true Liberalism.

The circular went on to point out how grievously the House of Lords had crippled the legislation proposed by the Liberal Government, and that the most important of all things, in the interests of the whole nation, was the insisting that the policy which the Federation formulated at Leeds in the preceding year, should be persevered with until it had been established beyond question that, where the two Houses of Parliament came into conflict, the will of the representative chamber should prevail.

The result of the General Election was an extraordinary one. On a poll of nearly 4,850,000 in the contested constituencies, the Tories secured a majority of a little over 100,000 votes, and, if they had held only the number of seats in the House of Commons to which that majority entitled them proportionately, their majority would only have been fourteen. Instead of this it was 152. The Liberal Party lost 110 seats and only gained twenty. With a majority of 100,000 votes in 1895, the Tories secured four times as large a majority of seats as the Liberal Party enjoyed in 1892 with twice as large a preponderance of the actual votes recorded at the polls. I do not wish in any way to deny that the result of the Election was a great Tory triumph, but I have never known an Election which was fought throughout upon such unblushing mendacity unless it was that of 1900. At the time it was held, the trade of this country was in a state of depression; everywhere the Tories made the declaration that, if they were returned, trade would improve. In certain of the

North Country constituencies, the amount of the weekly difference in wage which would be made to every working man if the Tories were returned was freely placarded upon the walls. Old Age Pensions were to be secured by supporting the Tory candidate. The great factories, such as that of Sir W. G. Armstrong & Co., Ltd., in Newcastle-upon-Tyne, were placarded over with "Vote for the Tory Candidates and better trade." The promises which were freely made everywhere were indeed broken directly the Election was over, but they served their purpose, and it is interesting to remember that the Tory writers and speakers came to the conclusion that the Liberal Party was dead. "Liberalism has been exterminated," was a constant saying, and the Liberal Party was no more to be regarded as a great political force. Political deaths of this kind are by no means uncommon, but they are followed by very certain resurrections.

Lord Rosebery had warned the Liberal Party, in a speech to the Liberal Agents at their breakfast at Cardiff, that if Liberals sustained a severe defeat at the General Election, it might be a blow from which it would be more difficult to recover than from former defeats, if only from the absence of that stimulating fervour of genius which so prominently characterised Mr Gladstone. And so it proved. The trump cards have for long years all been in the hands or up the sleeves of the Tories. As I have pointed out, trade had gone through a period of depression, and, though recovery had begun at the time of the Election, it had not recovered wholly, and although the specific pledges which the Tories gave were all broken, yet the good times did come. This to the Tory mind was *post hoc propter hoc* with a vengeance, and such orators as they had would have been more than mortal if they had not forced the argument home. Looking back over the years which have passed since the great change in social as well as in political life which was involved by the

transfer of power to the Tory Party, it is painfully evident the nation has lost in every way, in Imperial purpose, in lofty ideal, in earnest, unselfish endeavour. The political currency has been systematically debased; might has taken the place of right; size that of intellectual greatness. The penny in the pocket argument has been placed in the forefront of controversy, appeals to cupidity, to mental indifference, paltry pleasures, base instincts and desires, have been the habitual resources of the Tory so-called statesmen; political warfare has been waged by dodge, stealth, the perversion or suppression of fact, the habitual resort to bullying and vulgar abuse of their opponents; measures have been carried by brute force, not by argument, for that has been carefully and constantly stifled; the attention of the country has been turned from domestic affairs by constant foreign embroilments; and the worst passions of the people have been stirred up by perpetual wars, culminating in that which began in blindness and ended in a crime against every good British tradition, by the deliberate destruction of two nationalities, a destruction accomplished with the difficulty which the position of free peoples, fighting for home and freedom, must always ensure to the invader, even when of world-wide power. The foreign policy of the Tories has been consistent; they have crouched and cringed to the strong Powers of the earth, and have mercilessly crushed the weak ones. When our Liberal Imperialists preach their favourite doctrine of the continuity of foreign policy, we should demand that, as a condition precedent, the policy be a good one.

CHAPTER III

TEN YEARS OF TORY MISRULE AND THE SEQUEL

Constitution and Functions of Federation—Aid to Voluntary Schools — Annual Meeting, Huddersfield, 1896 — The Constitution of the Federation — Tory Foreign Policy and the Mekong—Rules—Lord Rosebery's retirement—Tory Education Bill withdrawn—New Education Bill Gifts to Voluntary Schools—Tory Foreign Policy—Annual Meeting at Norwich, 1897—Special General Committee Meetings at Derby—Workmen's Accident (Compensation) Act—Foreign Policy: Increased Expenditure—Jameson Raid—Annual Meeting at Leicester, 1898—Growing Militarism—Death of Mr Gladstone—Retirement of Leaders—Sir Henry Campbell Bannerman elected Leader—Annual Meeting at Hull, 1899 — The Hague Conference — The War: Annual Meeting, Nottingham, 1900—The War: General Election, 1900 — Death of Queen Victoria — Conference of Liberal Secretaries and Agents — General Committee at Rugby — Liberal Publication Department—Annual Meeting at Bradford—Special General Committee Meeting at Derby on the War — Emergency Meeting on Education Bill, 1902—Government and Liberty of Subject: the War—Annual Meeting at Bristol, 1902—Education Bill—General Committee, Birmingham, February 1903 —The Licensing Act—Peace—Annual Meeting at Scarborough, 1903—The Protection Bogey—General Committee, Leeds, February 1904: Chinese Labour—Federation Manifesto—South African War Commission—Little Stupid Wars—The End Approaches—Sir William Harcourt—Annual Meeting, Manchester, 1904 — The Coming Election—Annual Meeting at Newcastle, 1905.

SOME months have passed since the above was written, and a marvellous change has come over the political scene. I shall take up my narrative without entering into details of the present position more than to say that the tendencies of the Tory

Government noted above have shown themselves more universally both in Foreign and Domestic policy. They have been fully found out. It is now clear to the world what a sham and a shame their whole policy has been, how wickedly and wantonly they blundered into the South African war; with what criminal neglect of the precautions which were due to our brave soldiers they carried it on; how ruthless was the wanton cruelty with which, disregarding the rules and customs of civilised warfare, they devastated the land wherever they set foot, non-combatants, women and children, alike being made to suffer. The people who trusted them blindly but implicitly have learned, when too late, that they were simply used as the tools of the wealthy foreign Jews of the diamond and gold mines; and, when their task was done, they were cast aside in favour of the cheaper tools which the late Government provided by the re-institution of a form of the slavery which it has been our country's dearest boast that it had for ever destroyed. And now, as if to show that it held an undying hatred to everything which was good for the people generally, it has not only, in the interests of priestcraft, destroyed the one piece of national education which had been carefully and admirably built up through more than thirty years, but the Tory Government and the Tory Party have together threatened the integrity of our Empire, the friendship of our Colonies, our commerce and financial supremacy, and the comfort, happiness, and prosperity of our people, nay, almost the very existence of the poorest, by arranging a dishonest and double-faced campaign against that Free Trade which has converted the England of the thirties and forties of the last century—an England apparently doomed to the regeneration of a terrible revolution—to the England of to-day in which, whilst much remains to be reformed, every part of the social fabric has been peacefully and beneficently recreated.

There was an increase of the regular work of the

Federation involved in the return of our Party to opposition, and this year Mr Frank Barter was appointed our assistant secretary. We could not have made a better choice.

Constitution and Functions of Federation

In December 1895 the Annual meeting of the General Committee was held at Leeds, and the meeting is noteworthy if only from the fact that the father of the Federation, Mr William Harris of Birmingham, retired from the Committee on this occasion. No one had rendered more devoted service to the organization of English Liberalism.

The constitution of the Federation was, at this meeting, discussed at considerable length, and, on the motion of Mr C. P. Scott, M.P., it was resolved that "It be an instruction to the General Purposes Committee to consider whether the machinery of the Federation can be made more representative." Another matter which was taken into consideration was that of Education, towards which the Government had shown signs of serious malevolence, and a resolution was passed that "This Committee protests against the threatened proposal of the Government to strike a blow at the efficiency of public education, and thereby at our national prosperity, by crippling the financial powers of our representative educational systems. The Committee are strongly of opinion that no settlement of the question of National Education will be satisfactory which fails to provide an unsectarian school under public management within the reach of every family in the Kingdom, and objects to increased grants of public money to denominational schools unless accompanied by public local control."

The terrible state of Armenia was at this time much before the nation, and a further resolution was carried, "That this Committee, depressed and horrified at the continued barbarities of the Turkish Govern-

ment in Armenia, calls upon the English Government in accordance with the Treaty, to at once protect the Armenian subjects of the Porte."

The subject of the constitution and functions of the Federation having been raised at this meeting, the General Committee took them into serious consideration. They gave a great amount of time to the work, and they prepared a number of amendments both on the objects and rules of the organization. Perhaps the most important change proposed was that, after the adoption of the Annual Report at the Annual meeting of the Council had been moved and seconded, and before the resolution was put to the meeting, the Council was to be open for the free discussion of any matter affecting the policy or principles of the Liberal Party. The Committee said, "Upon this matter it must be obvious that, in the future as in the past, adequate discussion on debateable points can only take place at the meetings of the General Committee. To seek to turn an assembly like the Federation Council of perhaps 2000 people, sitting at the most for ten or twelve hours, into an open conference for the debate of multitudinous questions about which the Party has come to no agreement, is impossible. The less unwieldy General Committee, equally representative of the Federated Associations, is the body at which discussion should take place. The Council must remain largely an assembly of a declaratory character, a great national demonstration of the rank and file of the Party to ratify, emphasise, and give forcible public expression to the ascertained wishes of the Party on matters of agreed and settled policy."

I shall have to say more upon this matter when I speak of the next Annual meeting of the Council, for there the rules were thoroughly discussed, and the whole matter was carefully gone into. During this year, the General Purposes Committee gave special attention to improving the organization of the Party, and to improving the local organizations in those

constituencies where it had been allowed either to lapse or to become weak. It was obvious that no central Association, such as the Federation, could supply the first requisite for the successful organization of a constituency, namely, local interest and local effort in the work, but the Federation itself could stimulate this. The Federation itself must always be largely a reflex of the smaller local bodies existing within the area of its operations. The Report, which was presented in 1896 to the Annual meeting at Huddersfield, mentions the great work done by the Liberal Publication Department, especially at the General Election of 1895. Generally speaking a General Election casts its shadow before for several months, and the heavy work can therefore be spread out over a considerable period of time. In 1895 the crisis was a sudden one. The Government defeat took place quite unexpectedly and in the middle of a Session, but in spite of this the Publication Department in little more than a month printed and sent out from Parliament Street, and in many cases prepared, upwards of 25,000,000 leaflets. This did not include election forms and other miscellaneous publications. Of an Election edition, with portraits, of an invaluable booklet, *What have the Liberals done?* over one and a quarter million copies were circulated. In fact the strain which was put upon the resources of the Department, but which the efforts of that Department were able to cope with, is shown by the fact that the volume of business conducted at the 1895 election was twice as great as that in 1892. The Party has indeed great cause to thank at all times this Publication Department, and especially Mr Augustine Birrell, K.C. (now the Right Honourable Augustine Birrell, K.C., M.P., the President of the Education Department), for the services he rendered as Chairman, and Mr Charles Geake, who, as the Secretary of the Department and Editor of the *Liberal Magazine*, brings to his work a knowledge of politics and a capacity

for management and organization which have raised the Liberal Publication Department to a pitch of proficiency which is the admiration of all who are brought into contact with it. I should like to state here that the way in which every member of the staff of the Federation worked both night and day during the election was beyond all praise. Seeing much of that work, and being brought closely into contact with every department, it was to me then, and it remains, a marvel that so small a body of men could possibly have achieved the great results which they did.

AID TO VOLUNTARY SCHOOLS

At the General Election great attempts were made to obtain promises of support for further aid to Voluntary Schools, and so soon as the Queen's speech appeared, it became evident that the Education Bill of the Government would be designed as a measure for the relief of Voluntary Schools. At once the officials of the Federation issued a circular to the associated bodies upon the question. It is interesting to see that at every step which the Tories have taken upon the subject of education the Liberals have at once pointed out the imperfection and impropriety of the step proposed, and have endeavoured to prevent the matter being so dealt with as to become, what it is now, a mass of perplexities and inconsistencies which bid fair to cripple the possibilities of our national education. This circular pointed out that the compromise of 1870 was to be disturbed once more in the interests of the Managers of the so-called Voluntary Schools. The financial basis of the settlement of 1870 was that no locality should receive from the State any sum greater than that actually raised from the locality itself. In 1876, under a Tory Government, this essential condition was swept away, and schools were allowed to receive 7s. 6d. per head from the public funds without any

corresponding obligation on the part of the School Managers to provide a single penny out of local resources. In 1891 the Tory Government provided for a State grant of 10s. per child in lieu of the school fees, and allowed this sum to be treated as though it was part of the amount raised in the locality, an arrangement which, in some schools, gave the Managers an actual surplus. The result of those departures from the Settlement of 1870 was that of the total amount spent each year in the maintenance of Voluntary Schools three-fourths of the money was provided out of the public funds; the Voluntary School Managers, who were originally allowed to retain the management of their schools on condition that they raised locally at least as much as the Government grant, provided on the average only 2d. out of every shilling expended, retaining, however, the same exclusive control as before. The circular admitted that in the interests of education, Voluntary Schools required to have more money expended upon them, but demanded that, if that money was to be given by the State, three conditions must absolutely be observed. The first of these conditions was that, if a still larger proportion of the cost of education in the Voluntary Schools was to be borne by the public, the right of popular control must be secured. The second was that no additional grant of public money must go to decrease the dwindling proportion of the cost borne by the voluntary subscribers, but to increase the efficiency of the schools. The third point was that nothing should be done to impair the efficiency of the Board Schools, or to weaken in any way the existing guarantees for their unsectarian character. As we go forward the different movements made in the matter of education will be treated of, and it will be seen how absolutely the Government has disregarded and thrown aside every stipulation which the Liberal Party demanded from the first.

ANNUAL MEETING, HUDDERSFIELD

The Annual Meeting of the Council of the Federation was held in March 1896 at Huddersfield. I have mentioned several of the features of the Report, but there are other matters in it which are rather specially interesting. Amongst other things it showed how the promises made by the Tory Leaders at the General Election had fallen out of the Queen's speech, and were not even shadowed as remote possibilities. It is really diverting to read now that Temperance Reform was one of the subjects which Mr Chamberlain, with Lord Salisbury's express sanction, declared to be "ripe for practical legislation," and that the aged workers were assured that the only way to secure Old Age Pensions was by supporting the Tory Candidate! In the number of speeches thus successively repudiated as well as on the size of their majority, ministers were entitled to congratulate themselves on having created a record. In speaking of the Election Petitions, the aftermath of the General Election, the report showed how the effect of the legal decisions had been practically to make the Corrupt Practices Act, 1883, a dead letter. "The net result of these judgments makes it well-nigh impossible for a candidate with the purest intentions in the world to know what he may legally do and spend, and what he may not. It is no answer for him to be told that the decision in every case depends on the particular facts of the case. The law and its interpretation ought to be plain enough to make it possible for him to know beforehand what he is allowed to do." But what law ought to be and what law is are two very different things. It is a scandal to our legislative methods, and reduces Parliamentary Government to something like a farce, that three-fourths of our laws are not made by the united wisdom of King, Lords and Commons, but by judicial interpretations, the decisions of a certain number of learned but chance-chosen persons, as to

what in their wisdom or unwisdom they think the King, Lords and Commons intended to say, but did not, and perhaps could not say. There is another very serious difficulty. In all other branches of law the decisions of a Court of competent Jurisdiction are held to be precedents binding upon other Courts until they are overruled by a Court of Higher Jurisdiction, but in Election trials a decision in one place has no influence whatever upon another. The Judges seem to take rather special delight in showing their independence of each other's opinions, and the consequence is that verdicts which would, if they were required to be observed, settle law and practice and greatly purify elections, are cast ruthlessly on one side. I do not wish to say that our Judges are wilfully unfair on these matters, but as a rule a Judge is appointed to the Bench because he is a strong partisan, and a Judge is, after all, only mortal, and sometimes very mortal, and it is impossible to believe that his early training and his early predilections do not sometimes incline the scale in favour of the Party to which, in his more earnest days, he belonged. The report concluded with a few words upon the position of Foreign affairs which, since the Tory Government took office, had assumed overwhelming importance and gravity. The country had been happily free from foreign complications under the premierships of both Mr Gladstone and Lord Rosebery, and Mr George Curzon, the then under-secretary for Foreign Affairs (and now Lord Curzon, recently Viceroy of India), prophesied that all outstanding questions would quickly be settled in England's favour owing to the impression which had been formed abroad of the "calibre of the new Government." This was speedily shown to be the nonsense which it sounded. The crises in Foreign affairs were many and serious, but perhaps the worst of all the troubles which were speedily brought upon us were those connected with the Armenian question. It had been shown by the Government's

own publications upon the matter that 25,000 Christians had lost their lives at the hands of the Kurds, who were assisted, either actively or passively, on several occasions by the Turkish soldiery. Lord Salisbury, who had pledged the British honour to the unfortunate Armenian Christians by the Berlin Treaty and the Cyprus Convention, was now not content with publicly proclaiming that we were helpless, but he actually flouted the opinion that we had undertaken in those treaties to do more than watch events as interested spectators. The situation in Armenia indeed was a national humiliation to this country.

Again, between the time of the issuing of the report and the Annual Meeting, the Government had sent their extraordinary expedition into the Soudan, an expedition which was never explained, but which it was stated should stop so soon as it met with opposition. It was admirably described by Mr Asquith as making war on limited liability; limited in cost, limited in bloodshed, and limited in extent, —a wild and impossible idea.

THE CONSTITUTION OF THE FEDERATION

When the Annual Meeting gathered, the President had been requested to go very fully into the position of the Federation, as it had been for several months persistently attacked in certain of the London newspapers. Not only those representing the Tory Party, but even the respectable though somewhat priggish *Spectator*, had been using bad language about the conduct of the managers of the Federation. The charges were curiously contradictory. The objections were at once raised that the Leaders of the Party influenced the Federation, and that the Federation did not do that which was right because the Leaders did not influence it. But the charges were made entirely by persons who knew nothing really of the working of the Federation, who never

attended the meetings, never inquired what the position really was; who appeared to feel that, if they ascertained the facts of the case, they might be unable to continue the attacks which they were making, and which in the opinion of the General Purposes Committee, when genuine, were based upon entire ignorance or misconception. No specific charge was made. In moving the Report, the President explained explicitly, in the first place, the objects of the Federation, the first of which was to ascertain the will and desires of the Liberal Party in order to have them carried into law. To have them so carried, required that they should be accepted by the Leaders of the Party, and that the Leaders of the Party should have a sufficient force of representatives at their back; and the second object of the Federation was to see the Party efficiently organized in every part, and to furnish the constituencies with the means of political education. He then explained the nature of the Liberal Associations which were the constituent parts of the Federation. All power which the Federation had came from the parts which composed it, and it was of vital importance that those parts should be willing, active, and earnest. They gathered together in different parts of the country, from time to time, in conferences or General Committees to which every Association was entitled to send representatives. These might be held at any time, in any number, and in any part of the country, and might discuss any subject or subjects, might deal with practice or with principle, and were free and open in the widest sense. The General Purposes Committee was that which had been chiefly attacked, but that Committee was openly chosen, and every Institution required some Board of Management. The General Committee of the Federation elected the General Purposes Committee. One constant accusation was that the General Committees consisted of the Agents and Presidents of Liberal Associations. That was untrue; not one

twentieth part was composed of the Presidents and Agents of Liberal Associations, but they should remember that the Presidents of Liberal Associations were hard-working and sincere Liberals, chosen by their respective localities because they had won their confidence by their works in the Liberal cause. The Liberal Agents were not mere hirelings but earnest politicians. When we came to the parting of the ways, in 1886, some great inducements were offered to Agents to go over to the other side, in some cases double the salaries which we could give, but scarcely a man amongst them left the Liberal Party. It was also fully explained as to how it came that the resolutions at the Annual meeting of the Council were declarations of the wishes of the Party, and were not discussed, not because there was anything which should not be discussed, but because everyone felt that, in a great meeting, at which frequently 1500 to 2000 representatives were present, there could not be the necessary time given to such discussions, and secondly that the matters brought before these gatherings did not require discussion because they had met with the approval of the smaller but equally representative gatherings before which they had previously been brought. The resolutions were prepared after the General Purposes Committee had taken counsel with every Association belonging to the Federation. The resolutions in every case were the results of prior conferences, of prior Council meetings, of prior General Committee meetings, and so forth. When they had been thus prepared, and when they were to act as guides to the Leaders of the Party as to what the wishes of the Party were, it would be most unwise to throw them open to amendments which might be carried under the influence of the eloquence which is so characteristic of Liberal gatherings, and so certain and convincing, that the Federation might be committed to the adoption of amendments by the representatives of the individual associations which were absolutely

opposed to the wishes of the constituent bodies of such associations, or which would have no weight with those by whom alone they could be accepted and formulated with a chance of becoming law. This is not a theoretical objection. The Tory Pary have, on more occasions than one, at their Annual gatherings passed resolutions unanimously which their Prime Minister has, before their meeting closed, refused to consider. Our plan had worked for eighteen years and no resolution that the Federation had ever carried had been neglected by our Leaders. Then we were told that we influenced our Leaders too much, but our very *raison d'être* was to influence our Leaders. We did not wish to dictate to them or to hurry them; it was theirs to say the time when and how measures should be brought forward; it was ours to tell them what the decisions of the Party were. Next we were told that the resolutions were not genuine, that they were forced upon us by the Whips. There was not a grain of truth in this. The President read the following words which he had written down because he wished to be precise on this point. "I assert that not a single resolution has ever, at all events since 1886, been suggested, hinted at, drawn, altered, or manipulated, by any Whip or Leader whatsoever. As we, through our Executive Committee have received from you the trust to keep all matters and political principles for the National Liberal Federation, and for it alone, we have discharged that trust to the letter. We have preserved the Federation from any outside influence. On behalf of the Executive Committee, which has been strangely maligned in this matter, I defy each and every one of our opponents to deny the absolute truth of what I have stated; to give one single instance in which we have ever departed from the plain path of duty which we have entered upon. If they can do so, this is the time and place: we are willing and anxious to meet them." He then went on to deal with the connection between the Liberal Central

Association and the National Liberal Federation, each of which had its own work and did its own work, a work which lay quite apart one from the other. But in certain matters of political literature, education, and organization, which he called the machinery of politics, the two bodies did and must do precisely the same work. The Federation had more to do because it was more closely in touch with the Associations throughout the country. It was asserted that the Federation was always interfering with the Associations which constituted it, but the complaints which we frequently got were that we did not find sufficient speakers for this place or the other, that we did not have a dozen Front Bench men ready to plant here and there at all sorts of meetings, and so forth. Another complaint was that the Federation interfered in Elections and insisted upon selecting candidates. This was not the case. There was no interference but, if an Association came, as they constantly did, and asked for candidates to be suggested, it was our duty to endeavour to suggest candidates to them. Then there was aid to be given in the more important matter of political literature and education; this also was common alike to both bodies. The Liberal Publication Department was really one of our very finest institutions, and this involved precisely the same work for each body. To have this work, which is precisely the same work for each body, done under the same head was good business, so long as its being done under the same head did not interfere with the work which lay outside it being done properly; and it had been proved that the work which had to be done outside was done properly. Double labour and double expense were thus saved. It had been stated that the Liberal Central Association financed the National Liberal Federation. It was untrue; there had never been a financial transaction of any kind between the two Associations. The alliance between the two bodies prevented collision and ensured efficiency. The

present position had existed for ten years, and during that time the work had been done better than it was done before; there had been no clashing, no conflict between the two bodies; neither had interfered with the special work of the other, both had united in the work common to each, to the great benefit of the Party.

Tory Foreign Policy and the Mekong

Sir Edward Grey, in supporting the resolution for the re-election of the President and Treasurer, made one of those remarkable speeches upon foreign affairs which are not merely interesting to listen to but are full of education and enlightenment. He dealt with the constant statement of the Leaders of the Tory Party and of the writers in the Tory Press that, when the Tory Party was in power, they were sure to have a much stronger and more successful Foreign policy than if a Liberal Government was in office. Now he pointed out that the result of the return to power of the Tories was isolation, which some called splendid isolation, and he illustrated this by the settlement of the Siamese difficulty which had been completed by the Conservative Government. At the General Election it was constantly stated that Lord Rosebery and his colleagues had been weak upon this matter. The Liberal Government, whilst in power, had tried to make a settlement of the difficulty with France which had arisen by creating a buffer state. The Tories objected because they desired that the British should possess both banks of the Mekong river. The buffer state gave one bank to France and one bank to England. But now the Tories had signed an agreement with France to do away with the buffer state altogether, and had thus abandoned the bank of the Mekong which the Liberal Government had obtained for Britain: that is to say, they had complained that the Liberal Government had given up their claim to the territory on the far side of the Mekong, whereas, as

a matter of fact, they had actually occupied it with British troops, but the Tory Government had withdrawn the British troops altogether and shown the absolute falsity of their common boast that where the English flag had once floated it could never be taken down. He also went fully into the humiliation of British trade in the abandonment of our trading rights in Madagascar when the French had undertaken operations to modify their Protectorate in that Island.

RULES

But the chief business of this first day of the Conference was devoted to the question of the alteration of the Rules. Happy indeed is the society which has never to discuss its rules. There is no possible subject which supplies such an admirable area for illimitable discussion as the alteration of rules. Everyone may have a distinct view as to each sentence of each rule, almost as to every word of it, and this occasion was no exception to this general experience. The whole of the first sitting was devoted to the report and the consideration of the alterations proposed by the Committee. I have said that it was desired that the President should reply in detail to certain attacks and should set forth once more plainly what the Federation is, how it is worked, the objects of its various meetings, the relations between it and the Liberal Central Association, and I have described how this was done fully, and it does not require to be repeated. Anyone who is interested in the subject will get all the information he may need by referring to the printed Report of the proceedings at the Huddersfield meeting. As for the discussion upon the rules there is not much which need be said. A few alterations and amendments were made, the speeches generally speaking were short but there were many of them, and on the whole it appeared that the new rules had given satisfaction to the Federated Associations generally.

At the second sitting of the Council, the resolution which appealed most deeply to the feelings of the delegates was that dealing with Armenia. Professor John Massie, the Vice-President of the Oxford Liberal Association (now M.P. for North Wilts), moved, "That this Council expresses its deep sympathy with the suffering and persecuted Armenian subjects of the Sultan of Turkey, and its sense of shame that Great Britain is humiliated before the world by the failure of its attempts to secure for the Armenians liberty of conscience and protection for life, honour, and property. The Council believes that those demands should have been more resolute, but recognises with satisfaction the surrender by Her Majesty's Ministers of the false policy of supporting the Turkish Empire adopted by Lord Beaconsfield and Lord Salisbury at the time of the framing of the Berlin Treaty. The Council presses on Lord Salisbury and his colleagues the great responsibility which rests upon them, and records its opinion that the nation will not hold the Government guiltless unless everything possible is still adopted to bring about a cessation of the terrible misrule in the Armenian provinces." As the mover of the resolution said, "silence upon this subject was absolutely impossible." He dealt with it in detail and with great power. The resolution was indeed not a Party one, but I need not tell how, since the time of its being passed, the conduct then indulged in by the one barbaric power in a Continent calling itself civilized not only continued but went from bad to worse, and even yet Europe has never fully and properly coped with the cruelty and shame of one land which has long been an anachronism and disgrace. Perhaps there was something characteristic in this sample of the Tory Government's conduct of foreign affairs. They appear to have no ideal but that of the aggrandisement of the Empire, they acknowledge no standard of right and wrong in Foreign policy. The rights of weak peoples, the duty which every nation owes to humanity in general,

are either unknown to them, or denied by them, and one of the consequences is that they are powerless in peaceful negotiation. The report presented at this meeting, as I have already shown, pointed this out, and it may be that the humiliating position of our country was but one more outward and visible sign of that wretched spirit of materialism and militarism which had spread over Europe, but, which in our own land, developed most intensely and disastrously under the fostering influence and care of the Tory Administration. In a speech of remarkable force, Mr George R. Thorne, the President of the West Wolverhampton Liberal Association, seconded the resolution. It was a stirring appeal to the democracy. We must not forget that these words were spoken in March 1896. He said that he had been trying to understand why England, in regard to this great question of Armenia, seemed so cold and callous, and would endeavour to explain it by a contrast and a parallel. In Venezuela there were men who were prepared to face our kith and kin across the seas because there a few miles of land were at stake; in South Africa they had nearly had a storm which might have shipwrecked the Empire, but there, there were gold and goldfields; in Ashantee they had made a dusky Monarch grovel before a biscuit box because their expansion of trade was at stake; in Egypt, too, on account of rumours or the very breath of rumours, regardless of European complications, we were making expeditions no man knew whither or what the issue would be. But there, there were bonds and bondholders. He contrasted these feverish activities all over the world with our callous calm in Armenia. There, in the presence of carnage and cruelty oceans deep, in the face of responsibility mountains high, and there alone, we were impotent and paralysed. Why? There was no money in it. There was only men. Aye, and women and children. And he followed by bringing his lesson closely home to our own land, and pleaded for an awakening of

our national conscience, and the stirring of the heart of this country towards the claims of humanity, amidst applause which was overwhelming and which came from the very soul of the meeting.

At the great public meeting addressed in the evening by Lord Rosebery in the Rowley Music Hall, which had been specially fitted up for the occasion and which was crowded to its utmost capacity by more than 5000 persons, Lord Rosebery declined to speak "of that black and bloody page of Armenia, a chapter of our history to which we shall always look back with shame and remorse. If I begin on that I should be taken too far." Alas, since that night, the Tory Government has written a hundred chapters in our history the pages of which are black and bloody, and to which we look back with shame and remorse, but which would never have been written if the entire Liberal Party had been united and had been loyal to its noblest traditions.

Lord Rosebery's speech dealt principally with Foreign affairs, and particularly with the mysterious advance into the Soudan. But at the beginning he confirmed strongly what had been stated as to the freedom of the Federation from Front Bench influence. He said of the Newcastle Programme, "It was not the officials who imposed that programme on the National Liberal Federation; it was the National Liberal Federation who imposed it on the officials, with all its consequences good and evil. When I was an official, very much of an official, I woke up one morning and saw in the papers that the National Liberal Federation had decided to hold a conference on the subject of the House of Lords. I do not believe that a single official of the Government knew of that purpose excepting from the newspapers, yet it was a very momentous decision. It gave great impetus to a great cause; yet I am very certain that if the officials had been consulted, it would not have taken place at that precise moment." This surely is

proof positive that the policy of the Federation is not dictated by the Chiefs of the Party. Lord Rosebery spoke of his great desire to support the Foreign policy of the Government if he could, and stated that there was nothing that he had more at heart than to see both Parties in the State supporting in common the Foreign policy of the Government. "Now we are told," he said, "that our discourses on Foreign policy disturb the continuity of Foreign policy. That is a grave charge and, if I felt that there was any truth in it, I should feel considerable uneasiness. But what is this continuity of Foreign policy? In my view it is this, that one Government should, so far as is practicable without sacrifice of principle, endeavour to interweave its foreign policy with that of the preceding Government so as to preserve a consistent attitude abroad and prevent Foreign Powers from building on our Party differences and dissensions at home. This continuity of Foreign policy was first laid down as a maxim by Mr Gladstone's Government in 1886, and since then it has been on the whole fairly and honourably carried out. But that definition of mine is not the Tory definition. The Tory definition of continuity is something of this kind. When the Liberal Party is in office the Tories are to attack Liberal Foreign policy, to describe Liberal Ministers as pusillanimous, deplorable, muddle-pated politicians who bark but do not bite, who cringe before the strong and bully the weak, who are isolated from all sympathy in Europe, and whose course is a series of bounds from the fire into the frying-pan and from the frying-pan into the fire. When the Tories are in office the definition seems to be something like this, that we are to listen with bowed heads and in a deferential manner to whatever may be said on that subject. That does not seem to me to be a tenable proposition. We do not want to impair the authority of Great Britain abroad, but we should not be upright citizens if we could timidly and silently watch the ship of State, buffeted and

storm-tossed about, as it has been in the seas of foreign policy during the past six months. At one moment we seem to be on the verge of war with the United States, at another moment we seem to be on the verge of war complications with Germany, and at the present moment we are embarking on war ourselves with no particular enemy that I can discover. But there is this further question, I think, before the Government asks us to respect the continuity of Foreign policy. They preach the continuity of Foreign policy; if they preach they should practise it if only with themselves."

The whole speech was valuable and full of interest but the peroration gave it quite especial value. "The future of the Liberal Party lies in the hands of the Liberal Party itself, and your future lies with yourselves. Its fame, its fortune, its influence are no longer, as they were sixty or one hundred years ago, the appanage of a dozen great families. Those great families have left us, and the times are out of joint for anything of the kind. The fame and the fortunes of the Liberal Party lie with the people themselves. The policy of the Liberal Party is no longer what a few Dukes may decree, but what the people of this country require. What is this Liberalism that we talk so much about? It is not a formula, it is not a set creed, it is not a series of fixed propositions; it is a living spirit; the spirit in which great questions are approached and in which they are treated; broad, unprejudiced, and sympathetic, as opposed to a spirit which is narrow, and selfish and timid. That spirit cannot lie dormant; it must again arise in our midst and breathe life into our dormant constituencies, and thrill the intellects and energies of our people. I would not have you force it, but I would have you favour it; I would have you teach it; I would have you practise it; I would have you test men and measures by it; I would have it inspire your homes, your lives, and your neighbourhoods. And if that

be so, we shall not simply be good Liberals but good patriots too. For it is the essence of an Empire like ours that it shall be maintained with equity and justice, and based upon those eternal principles of self-government which stimulate and develop the resources of our Race."

In the speech which he made the following day, at the breakfast given by the General Purposes Committee to the Liberal Secretaries and Agents, Lord Rosebery again treated of the House of Lords. He alluded to a charge which had been made, both in Tory newspapers and in Tory speeches, that his recommendation of Peerages to the Queen had been corrupt and scandalous, and he pointed out how it was a scandalous imputation and a scandalous lie. In the abstract he had no objection to recommending the creation of Peers, in the concrete he would frankly admit that he rather hoped to avoid it. "I had embarked in an agitation against what I believed to be the undue power and privileges, and unfair constitution of the House of Lords, opinions which I still hold, and which so far as I can predict will only leave me with life itself. At any rate I hope I may outlive the present constitution of the House of Lords." The only Peers he had recommended had been two men with a great stake in the country and high position, and one of them in a high industrial capacity whom Mr Gladstone had promised, when in office, to recommend, and two others, one a political opponent, the Governor of the Cape of Good Hope, and the other the late Minister of Agriculture who had served well and honourably both as a Minister and in an independent capacity. But no question had ever been raised or even suggested of any of those four gentlemen giving a shilling or a farthing to the Election funds, or even subscribing five shillings a year to a local Liberal Association. And he ended by saying that he had had an opportunity in which he rejoiced of nailing one conspicuous lie to the wall. "It won't

stop other lies being told. But we are always told that criticism is one of the gratifying incidents of public life. I do not object to criticism, but I do think it should be conducted with some regard for truth. Well, let us resolve that we will conduct our criticism with some regard for truth, and that we will not scatter dirt on the eminent men who form the Government as it was scattered on those men, perhaps not less eminent, who formed the last Government."

Lord Rosebery's Retirement

Before the next Annual meeting of the Council of the Federation, Lord Rosebery had ceased to lead the Liberal Party. His giving up the Leadership was not only voluntary but unexpected; it was done without consultation with those who had served in his Ministry, and apparently without any direct or avowed reason. In his letter to the Senior Whip, of 8th October 1896, he mentioned that "he found himself in apparent difference with a considerable mass of the Liberal Party on the Eastern question." He spoke afterwards of external and internal differences, and stated that he gave up the proud post of Leader of the Liberal Party in order to promote unity.

I shall not discuss the matter further, but many of the rank and file of the Party felt and still feel that it is one of those which has never received adequate explanation. There were probably reasons for this abstention—it is certain that Lord Rosebery aimed at what he believed to be the best interests of the Party.

Tory Education Bill Withdrawn

When the Council held its Annual meeting at Huddersfield the Education Bill of 1896 had not been introduced, but when Sir John Gorst brought it

forward on the 31st March, it proved to be complicated and controversial, and constituted, as Mr Acland said, the greatest educational upheaval the country has ever seen. A meeting of the General Committee of the Federation was at once summoned and held at the Westminster Town Hall on 29th April. There was an exceedingly numerous and representative attendance, and the Bill was condemned, and the strongest opposition to it in Parliament was threatened, whilst the meeting called upon all who were interested in national education to make it clear that the proposals of the Government were opposed to the best interests of the people and were repudiated by the country. Copies of the resolution were communicated to the affiliated Associations, and an appeal was made to each of them which had not already convened a public meeting to protest against the Bill, to lose no time in bestirring itself. The Liberal Publication Department did splendid service in editing, publishing, and widely distributing much effective literature, and the National Education Emergency Committee and other organizations rendered signal service. But so soon as the real purport of the Bill became clear, the agitation against it was anything but a partisan one. Public bodies of all kinds, County Councils, Town Councils, District Councils, and School Boards, were as emphatic as Liberal meetings and Associations in their protests against the various portions of the Government scheme.

The Bill was read a second time on the 12th May by the great majority of 267, and the Committee stage began on 11th June. On 15th June Mr Balfour declared that the Government intended to carry the whole Bill. One week later he had to withdraw the entire measure, which was the principal measure put forward in their first Session by the men who were fond of speaking of themselves as the strongest Ministry of modern times.

New Education Bill Gifts to Voluntary Schools

They however announced that they were determined to pass a Bill early in the next Session, so that at all events the Voluntary Schools should not suffer in consequence of the great rebuff inflicted on Ministers by this legislative fiasco, and Parliament was called together sooner than usual in order to carry out their wish. On 1st February 1897, the new Bill was introduced, and as was pointed out by the officials of the Federation in a Manifesto which they issued on the 6th February, the Bill violated every principle which the Liberal Party had laid down as governing state aid to elementary schools, especially did it violate that principle of statutory equality which had previously obtained in the payment of State grants to elementary schools, the principle that in the distribution of money from public funds the State should neither know nor make any unfair or invidious distinction between the Board and Voluntary Schools. But all that was of little consequence to the Tory Government. Although the matter was not concluded in the year 1896-7 of the Federation's history, I may mention that the Bill was strenuously and stoutly opposed not only in the House of Commons but throughout the country. It was forced through the House of Commons in a manner which should never be forgotten. It was forced through without the alteration of so much as a single comma. The Tories have introduced this unreasoning method of dealing with important measures; it will go hard, if, for greater and more important objects, the Liberals cannot "better their instructions." The Tory Government went on generally in its old course, doing little at home, and that little badly, increasing expenditure on useless armaments, and embroiling the country in a constant succession of foreign complications "on the North-West Frontier of India,

in the near East of Europe, in the far East of Asia, in the deserts of the Soudan, in South Africa, in West Africa, in East Africa, in Beluchistan, in Tunis, in Madagascar." In some of these cases war resulted, in others it was avoided only by concessions to which Imperialists applied the adjective "graceful," but which, if they had been made by the Liberal Party, would have been condemned by the Tories and the Imperial Press as dishonourable.

TORY FOREIGN POLICY

Now it is instructive to look back to the Foreign policy of this Tory Government, and to contrast it with that which distinguished the successive Premierships of Mr Gladstone and Lord Rosebery. Under the Tory Government we were never out of war, and the wars were intolerable and such as no reasonable nation, however fond of fighting (if indeed that does not involve the impossible), can find any kind of satisfaction in. The High Tory ideal is to be subservient to the strong and to crush the weak. They have up to the present time been in power for seventeen out of the last twenty years. From 1886 to 1892 they held Ireland down by armed force, but the stern condemnation by the nation of their foreign policy in 1880, and the vigilance of the Liberal Party, prevented any heroic misdoings abroad, and it is fair to say that Lord Salisbury was at the plenitude of his power during those years and threw his great influence into the scales in favour of Peace. When the new Tory Government came into office and assumed the reins of power, our foreign difficulties began. The first was that with France about the Mekong river—this I have already explained. The Tory Government reversed the policy of its predecessor and handed over both banks of the river to France.

Now it is no question here whether in taking this action they behaved generously to France or not, it

is simply one more evidence of how the Tories, when out of office lay down a doctrine, but, when they get office and power, their "for ever" doctrine comes to an end, and foreign policy ceases to be continuous.

And I may point out here how in 1896 in Madagascar, and in 1897 in Tunis, the Tory Government gave way to France and greatly injured the commerce of this country without any reasonable attempt to come to a fair bargain. The conditions which they accepted were disastrous and quite unnecessary; there was no question of going to war with France: it was simply the point of obtaining a reasonably fair bargain, and, in both instances, the interests of this country were sacrificed.

But when the Tory Government came to deal with weak peoples, it was quite another matter. It had scarcely got into office in 1895 before the Colonial Department found that the great King of Ashantee required chastisement for some imaginary offence. He sent two of his principal men to this country to offer any kind of submission which might be exacted, declaring that he had no wish to offend or fight this great nation. The Colonial Secretary refused to see his Envoys and declared that they were not properly accredited. So we sent an army to fight a people who did not wish to fight us, to kill them and to destroy their villages and towns. It was really a hideous walk-over, and the King was taken prisoner, and his umbrella was sent to our Queen, and we added Ashantee to our possessions. Bnt afterwards we tried the two Envoys before an English Judge at Sierra Leone, and it turned out that they had been sent to us properly accredited by the Ashantee King, and that the Colonial Secretary had been wrong, and that this Ashantee war was one of the many little Tory wars for which there has been no moral or political justification. The men we had done to death in it were thus ruthlessly and wantonly murdered.

We had further risings to deal with in consequence

of this blind policy. It seemed that there was some Gold Stool, the great emblem of power in this somewhat uncivilized country, which we had not got possession of, and hundreds of thousands of pounds, and large numbers of valuable lives, were sacrificed in endeavouring to find it, and we have not got it yet! Then, in 1896, we were surprised by the intelligence that our troops had been despatched into the desert dividing Upper Egypt from the Soudan by a distance of 300 miles. No explanation was given to us of where or why they were going, or what it was meant they should do. But the expedition involved what was really war or rather massacre upon our part. This was a forcible illustration of the unwisdom of our traditional policy in such matters. We permit the Government of the day to commence a war which will cost the nation much in lives and money, and from which any possible advantage to be gained may be too remote to be discovered even by a prancing pro-Consul or a fire-eating Colonel, and yet the chosen representatives of the people who will have to bear the cost, and even the shame and disgrace of the war, are not consulted upon the matter at all. Well, we invaded the Soudan, we killed enormous numbers of men whose crime was the defence of their Fatherland; we lost perhaps a fiftieth part of their number; and we nominally restored to Egypt, but actually added to the British possessions, 950,000 square miles of territory much of which had never belonged to Egypt at all, whilst that which had belonged to it for half a century had been systematically and brutally misgoverned.

And so I might go on and point out the cruel iniquities perpetrated under the ægis of the British Empire in Matabeleland, Mashonaland, and Bechuanaland; but there are many other matters yet to be dealt with closely connected with the history of the Federation, and, before my task is ended, I shall have to point out greater crimes committed by the Tory Government against the

beloved name and fame of our Mother country. I have heard too often the accusation that those who dare to point out these things are the friends of every country but their own not to know that it is the cowardly defence of those who are inwardly conscious that their actions will not bear investigation.

At the General Committee meeting at Liverpool held in December 1896, there was a very large attendance of delegates from all parts of the country. The Armenian question was again brought forward, and, while recognizing the importance of joint action by the Powers of Europe for the better government of the Turkish Empire and the protection of its Christian subjects, the meeting expressed its profound regret that the attempts which had been made to bring about such action had been so barren of good results. And that was still true seven years afterwards. The unspeakable Turk never ceased to carry on his work of torture and murder, and that which is worse than either, and, even in June 1904, there were terrible further atrocities. Thus had this too constant repetition dulled our senses, we passed by and it was nothing to us, and yet all this time we had a government which had laid aside social reforms as being parochial and of minor importance, and which had occupied such time as it could spare from wasting the substance and increasing the burdens of the country by unnecessary wars, in upsetting well-established Liberal reforms and carrying retrograde or useless measures; grapes will flourish upon thorns before true radical reforms come from a Tory Government. And now, as 1905 drew to a close, we saw how the Armenian subjects of Russia have been treated by the authorities of that country in such a way as showed that those authorities desired to emulate the atrocities of the Turk. They have however brought with them a speedy and terrible Nemesis. In order to crush what were called the revolutionary tendencies of the Armenians

the Russian Governors deprived them of arms whilst carefully arming the Tartar populations of the towns and villages, and excited the old racial and religious animosity of the Tartars which had been slumbering and would, in the opinion of the people on the spot, have continued to slumber but for the active interference of the Government. Then the massacres of the Armenians began, and then the Tartars, flushed with their easy triumphs, determined upon resisting the Russian authorities themselves, and the tremendous conflagrations at Baku and throughout the oil district, and the terrible atrocities in which the Cossack tribes emulated the Tartars, were carried out with pitiless severity.

ANNUAL MEETING AT NORWICH, 1897

When the nineteenth Annual Report of the Federation was presented to the Annual meeting held in Norwich in March 1897, it stated that so far hardly any progress had been made with the programme with which Ministers associated themselves at the last General Election, and it was "one of the paradoxes of the situation, that Mr Balfour, who promised School Board rates should be charged on the Imperial Exchequer, should have put aside Sir John Gorst in order himself to take charge of an Education Bill which, whilst giving £620,000 a year from the Imperial Exchequer to the privately managed schools, gave not a single sixpence in relief of the School Board rates which were to disappear altogether."

The Norwich meeting was held in the year of the Queen's Diamond Jubilee, and the first business of the Federation was to tender its congratulations to her on attaining the sixtieth year of her reign, and gratefully to recognise with loyal appreciation her constitutional practice, her ever-ready sympathy, and the gracious influence of her personal example.

After this a number of amendments to the Federation Rules, which had been proposed by the Kingston Division Liberal Association, were moved *en bloc*, but it was resolved that, as the existing rules had only been adopted in the previous year, a longer period should be given in which to test them in practical operation, and in the meantime the Executive Committee were requested to take the amendments into careful consideration and report upon them to the next Annual meeting.

The Education question was the subject of two resolutions, and then the position of Crete in its heroic struggle for freedom from Turkish tyranny and the futility of our intervention to prevent the Armenian massacres were dealt with by that true patriot, the Right Honourable James Bryce, in a speech of remarkable power and insight. "In the annals of British diplomacy there was no record of more pitiful impotence than the record of this four months of unchecked massacre," is a tremendous and true indictment of our powerful Tory Government. These matters were also finely handled at the great public meeting which was held on the evening of the first day of the Council gathering, and was addressed by the leaders of the Party in both Houses, Lord Kimberley and Sir William Harcourt. Lord Kimberley has since passed away, but he has left behind him a fine memory. He never spoke without helping to clear the questions upon which he treated from the obscuration which political discussion too often occasions, and which hides (and is not infrequently intended to hide) the real matter at issue. "I say plainly and distinctly that I hope and believe we shall sever ourselves altogether and for ever from the old policy of maintaining the integrity of the Ottoman Empire. How can it now be the interest of this country to maintain any longer that cruel, effete, and blood-stained Government, which so long has desolated some of the fairest regions of the East?" This emphatic state-

ment from the veteran statesman occasioned much satisfaction.

Sir William Harcourt, whom we have also los dealt powerfully with the Government's home policy as well as with its mismanagement of Foreign affairs. His exposure of the conduct of the Ministry upon the education question was remarkably vigorous. "Nobody heard the speech of Mr Balfour, in which he opened the Education Bill without seeing that he was talking about a thing with which he had no acquaintance. We tried to get explanations; he gave us none; and the other night he said that he preferred the fluid method of dealing with the subject; the fluid method of dealing with the education of the people! But the remarkable part of the matter is that upon the Government Bench is sitting the man who does know all about it, the Vice-President of the Council on Education, but he has been closured from the very first, and he is not allowed to say a single word upon the subject. Why not? I will tell you. Because he does know all about it. Now this thing has been treated as a joke, but it is past a joke, and in my opinion it is a public and Parliamentary scandal; it is an insult to the House of Commons, and it is an outrage on the administrative system of this country." But indeed this speech of Sir William Harcourt's is still well worth reading, for much of it was not merely for the passing occasion but for all time. Let this instance bear witness to that: "If I were asked to define the great distinction between the Liberal and the Tory Party it would be this, that the Liberal Party never surrenders the principles that it espouses, and that the Tory Party always in the end adopts those principles." There were two important features of this annual meeting and they were both somewhat new. Mr Sam Woods, M.P., moved, "That this Council expresses its belief that no Employers' Liability Bill will be satisfactory to the wage earners of the country unless it aims primarily at the prevention of accidents rather than

at the mere provision of money compensation. The Council earnestly desires to seek closer and more cordial co-operation among all sections of the Liberal Party and all the forces that make for progress, believing that only by such mutually sympathetic action can those important social reforms be achieved which are so urgently demanded by the growing needs of the community."

Mr Alfred Billson, M.P., seconded and Mr R. B. Haldane, Q.C., M.P., supported the resolution. He advocated a compensation system, such as existed in some parts of the Continent, under which the workmen would be at once compensated whether the employer had been negligent or not, and the insuring body would have, in the case of a negligent employer, a remedy against him which that body and not the workmen would put in operation. The consequence of this system in Germany was that Insurance Associations inspected the works of employers with a care and certainty not realised by any form of government inspection, because unless they could make good their claim against the employer so much would be taken out of their hands which would not be recoverable. The plan he was suggesting would bring on to a common ground all sections of reformers. And then he went on to say: "But there are other things to be thought of in addition to the employers' liability. To bring all sections of the Liberal Party together they must embrace a programme that would raise the status of labour and break down the social barriers between one class of worker and another. The real leveller would be the schoolmaster. Then, if the Liberal Party was to be a living force, it must take up the question of the land. That was a part of the Labour programme which would touch the hearts, minds, and consciences of the people throughout the country." That was indeed well said. The largest question by far which we have before us now is that of the land. It is the first question which, if grappled with in a

thoroughly radical spirit, will bring together the whole mass of men who are really in favour of progress. My own belief is in the provision of small holdings, a large and liberal provision giving the Local authorities great powers for the compulsory purchase of land, and for the sale of it in small plots, advancing money upon very easy terms to the purchasers upon security of the land itself and upon houses to be erected upon it, so that, in fact, even the rent which is at present paid by agricultural labourers should be sufficient, spread over a number of years, to enable them to build their own houses and pay both for houses and land.

The other important feature of this annual meeting was the passing of a resolution in favour of the just and wise principle of international arbitration.

It was moved by that lifelong worker in the sacred cause of peace, Mr W. R. Cremer, and seconded by Mr Frank Wright, the President of the North Birmingham Liberal Council. It ran: "That this Council once more records its warm approval of the efforts which are being made in this and other countries to promote the just and righteous principle of international arbitration. The Council expresses its satisfaction at the agreement to submit to arbitration the difficulties between Great Britain and Venezuela. It rejoices also that a general arbitration Treaty between this country and the United States has been signed by the representatives of the two Governments, and earnestly hopes that the Treaty will be ratified by the American Senate."

This subject of International Arbitration is of such importance that I may perhaps just mention that, from the extraordinary book upon the subject published by Dr Evans Darby, the Secretary of the Peace Society, we learn that in the last century, between the years 1850 and 1900, both inclusive, there were no fewer than 191 instances of International arbitration, in addition to 126 Arbitral Boards and Commissions involving the application of the principle of arbitration, or appointed to regulate

disputed questions, and 118 delimitation Commissions, and thirty-three National Commissions, so that, in fifty years, there were no fewer than 468 cases in which the principle of arbitration was acknowledged and acted upon.

Special General Committee Meetings at Derby.

During the remainder of the year 1897 much valuable work went forward. Special meetings of the General Committee were held at Derby on 26th May and on 7th December, 1897 to consider the subject of registration and electoral reform. At the first meeting, on 26th May, resolutions were brought forward by the Committee, and to them there were many notices of amendments given by affiliated Associations. There was a long and full discussion upon both resolutions and amendments, and it was finally resolved that the result should be communicated to all the affiliated Associations, together with the amendments dealing with Women's Suffrage and the closing of Clubs and public-houses on polling days during the polling hours; that the Associations should be requested to consider them, and send the conclusions at which they arrived to the Secretaries of the Federation, so that a resolution could be framed embodying the expressed opinions of the Federated Liberal Associations of the country. This was to be presented to an adjourned meeting of the Committee to be held in the autumn. There was also an instruction given to the Executive Committee to obtain and circulate among the affiliated Associations as quickly as possible the best information on the precise working and effect of the Second Ballot and of the Compulsory vote.

This was fully attended to. The amended motions which had been carried on the kindred subjects of Registration and Electoral Reform, together with the questions relating to Women's Suffrage and the

closing of licensed premises and clubs on the polling day, were remitted to the affiliated Associations for their consideration, and they were asked to send the conclusions arrived at to the Federation Secretaries not later than 30th September, in order that the Executive Committee of the Federation might be guided in framing for the joint meeting of the General Committee to be summoned in the autumn a resolution which should embody the expressed opinions of the Federated Liberal Associations of the country.

The memorandum upon the subject of the Second Ballot was carefully prepared and sent to the affiliated Associations on the 7th August.

The adjourned meeting of the General Committee to further consider the subjects of Registration and Electoral Reform was held in Derby on the 7th December. There was a long and eager discussion, many amendments were moved and several were carried. Perhaps the most hotly contested point was the extension of the Parliamentary Franchise to Women. As this meeting was a fair sample of that which takes place at a good General Committee meeting when some important question, upon which different views are entertained in the Party itself, is brought forward, I give the resolution as passed by the meeting, putting the alterations and amendments made to the original resolution in italics. I do this because papers and works assuming to speak with authority, but showing as little knowledge really as those who speak of the things they know not, (who are fitly dealt with in 2nd Peter, chapter 2, verse 12,) frequently state that "the General Committee is rarely convened because its list of business is settled by the Executive Committee, and because the Liberal Associations which send their delegates to the General Committee are not informed of the matters which are to come before it, or only informed a short time before it meets." Such statements are the half truths which the late Poet Laureate stigmatized, as

I think the resolution itself with the amendments and alterations sufficiently shows. "That this Committee believes that *one of* the foremost and immediate *objects* of the Liberal Party should be to bring about those reforms which are imperatively needed in the laws affecting registration and elections as a necessary preliminary to any real era of radical reform.

"This Committee holds that the *Parliamentary Franchise should be simplified*, and the principle of 'one man one vote' *carried out by the substitution of registered Adult Manhood suffrage with three months' residential qualification in the place and stead of all existing qualifications.*

"The appointment of a public paid registration official in each Parliamentary division.

"That temporary parochial relief shall not disqualify its recipient for the franchise, *and that the Parliamentary franchise be extended to women.*

"That all elections shall be held on one and the same day.

"That the polling hours be extended *in those districts in which such extension is necessary to enable the electors to record their votes without difficulty* and that all electors inside the polling booth at closing time be permitted to vote.

" *That at every Parliamentary election whether for a single or a two Member constituency where no candidate or condidates as the case may be secures a clear majority of the votes polled, there shall be a second ballot.*

"That official expenses of elections shall be paid out of public funds and the principle of payment of Members be recognized, in order that electors may be free and unfettered in choosing who shall represent them in the House of Commons, and that the Corrupt and Illegal Practices Prevention Act be reformed.

"Further this Committee reiterates the opinion expressed by the Council of the Federation at the Norwich meeting on the 18th March last that the House of Commons should no longer be subjected

to the veto of a hereditary non-representative and irresponsible House of Peers."

The discussions at this, as at the earlier meeting, were full and complete, and the result arrived at was of real value, but the protracted character of the debate proved how wise was the rule which made the annual meetings of the Federation occasions when declarations of the special wishes of the Liberal Party as represented by the Federated Associations are made, and not times when 1500 persons discuss what those wishes are. Such discussions, but conducted in gatherings of more practical dimensions, precede all of the declarations which are made.

How much idle writing would be spared if the men who write critical histories would take the trouble to look all round the subjects they write upon.

I have before me a "History of Organizations of Political Parties" in this Country which simply teems with inaccuracies so far as English political organizations are concerned, and yet the casual reader may conceivably mistake it for a work of real authority. It is an instance of the common danger of starting investigations with a preconceived theory. The Talmud wisely observes "Men find what they go out to seek."

I have mentioned, from time to time, the growth in value of the Liberal Publication Department. It made special progress during the year 1897, and it proved quite invaluable to Liberal workers, and speakers for the information which it gave could be relied upon. Even *Punch* which has for so many years departed from its first love, as it has lost in originality and found more Conservative tendencies, recommended the *Liberal Magazine* to all politicians "as being full of information on a wide range of public matters." I do not think that any Party has ever been more usefully served than has the Liberal Party by its Publication Department.

Workmen's Accident (Compensation) Act

In 1894, the House of Lords had wrecked Mr Asquith's Liability Bill by which 53 per cent. of the accidents occurring to 13,000,000 workmen would have been provided for, but, in 1897, the same House allowed the Workmen's Accident (Compensation) Act, providing for compensation in the case of 70 per cent. of the accidents occurring to 6,000,000 workmen in selected dangerous trades, to become law. This Act was not opposed by the Liberal Party, and is perhaps the only social measure which can fairly be described as good, for which the Tories can claim credit since the fall of Lord Beaconsfield in 1880, with the exception of Free Education.

Foreign Policy: Increased Expenditure

That serious burden upon even a most prosperous nation, the increased expenditure on armaments, went rapidly forward. In the face of universal foreign complications this was to be expected. I have said much about the Tory love of a spirited foreign policy, which simply means the bullying of all nations or peoples whom we conceive not to be able to stand up for themselves. The year 1897 saw how little faith is to be put in the preaching of Tory Ministers. When the Liberal Party is in power we hear much of the continuity of foreign policy as though the character of the policy to be continued were matterless, and yet, in the case of the North-West Frontier of India, Lord Salisbury's Government deliberately reversed the policy fixed on by the preceding Liberal Government. High military authorities were nearly at one as to the wisdom of that policy, but the abandoned road from Peshawur to Chitral was to be made and Chitral retained, in spite of our solemn pledge to the hill tribes who, not being Christians, rose to prevent the invasion of their country. Might prevailed but at enormous

cost. More troops had to be employed than were found necessary to quell the Indian Mutiny. Money was poured out like water, the hill tribes were massacred, their crops and villages wantonly and wickedly destroyed, and we practically gained nothing. What we lost we may one day bitterly learn.

This year was a specially disgraceful one so far as our foreign policy was concerned. I have already mentioned the foolish and wicked re-annexation of the Soudan, the one standing excuse for which was and is the checking of the slave trade. Alas for Tory consistency! In this very year Mr Curzon, then Under Secretary for Foreign affairs, justified the British Administrator at Zanzibar who supplied a slave master with a force of police to enable him to recover his runaway slave; and Mr Joseph Chamberlain refused to interfere with the action of the Cape Government when it sold into forced apprenticeship, the most vicious form of slavery, the Bechuanas who had risen against shameful oppression and had surrendered. In this year our trade rights in Tunis and Madagascar were given away without any attempt to obtain a fair bargain. This was an extraordinary instance of the inutility of Tory Ministers in Foreign affairs.

In the case of Madagascar, Lord Salisbury wrote some excellent despatches protesting against what the French had done, but our trade rights went for ever, and Mr Balfour contentedly observed "there the matter rests."

In Tunis our trade rights were signed and sealed away by Lord Salisbury himself. Permanent rights advantageous to British trade in Tunis were bartered away for temporary rights with the result that, in 1912, the new Tunis Convention will be a document authorising the exclusion of all British manufactures from that country, and the extraordinary thing is that Lord Salisbury, when making one of those graceful concessions, got nothing whatever in return.

There was no reason for strong language or threats in such cases, simple ordinary business foresight and prudence and a little firmness, would have been sufficient to have insured absolute fair-play.

JAMESON RAID

But the most shameful episode of all, so far as the Tory Government was concerned, was the Jameson Raid and the ridiculously abortive Inquiry into its origin which was held under Government control. This is perhaps the most disgraceful Parliamentary transaction since Parliament got the right to be considered a free institution, and the real source of the strange hypnotic influence which was practised by Mr Joseph Chamberlain over the Liberal Members of the South African Committee will one day be known. We shall assuredly learn at whose door the guilt of conniving at that great iniquity has to be laid, so far as men of high position in this country are concerned. They have succeeded in concealing the truth for a time. They may, happily for themselves, possibly have passed away before the full facts become known; but their memories will be infamous as long as truth and justice, honour and loyalty, retain any meaning.

But, whatever the facts may prove, one thing is certain, the Inquiry should have been carried through to the very end. Nothing can excuse the placing in the witness-box of the man who knew everything, who had with him the whole of the telegrams and papers which would show, beyond controversy, where the truth lay, and then never requiring their production. It was well known that he was a man who would not lie, and he was dropped like a too hot potato. But this is terrible. This was no question of the interests of this Party or that Party, of this or that Statesman or Minister, or this or that distinguished or eminent individual,

however great he might be. The good name of England was at stake, and, in view of our country's fame, the whole matter should have been ripped open, probed to the very bottom, and nothing should have been concealed, but all fully and forcibly revealed, and the culprit, the hidden, skulking coward who was *particeps criminis*, should have been exposed to the ignominy and contempt which no one ever more richly deserved.

The reader will not have forgotten that at the Annual meeting of the Federation, held at Huddersfield in 1896, the rules were recast after exhaustive and exhausting discussion which occupied the whole of the first Session.

At the next Annual meeting, held at Norwich, amendments were moved to six of the eight rules which had been adopted the year before. Again the whole of the first session was taken up with a profitless discussion which ended by the meeting desiring the Executive Committee to take the proposals into consideration and to report upon them at the next Annual meeting.

The Committee reported to the meeting held at Leicester in March 1898, that it had met several times to consider the matter, and had drawn up a long and full memorandum setting out clearly the reasons which led them to differ from all of the proposed alterations, and that it had invited the framers of them to meet and discuss them in friendly conference. When this was found to be impracticable, the Executive Committee resolved to circulate the memorandum amongst the Associations, and to ask them whether they wished for further alterations in the rules, and, if so, to specify their requirements. The result was, that at least 90 per cent. of the Associations desired no further change, at all events until the new rules had been tried sufficiently long to let it be seen whether or not their working gave satisfaction.

Annual Meeting at Leicester, 1898

At this meeting at Leicester it was resolved to create a special fund for re-organizing those constituencies in which the Party machinery was defective. Much was stated, in the speeches advocating this step, as to the necessity for local self-government, and, where constituencies could stand alone, interference was strongly deprecated. The absolute need of full organization and education was earnestly inculcated, and the great value of small subscriptions from those who could not afford large ones was insisted on. The man who subscribes to his Association inevitably feels that it in some sense belongs to him, and he will be the more prepared to render personal service when the fighting time comes.

Growing Militarism

But, looking back at this and the next Annual meeting, now when eight momentous years have passed, the most significant feature of them, not unnoticed then but not clearly understood, was the feeling of anxiety as to the future of our foreign policy arising from the provocative action of the Government and the spirit of jingoism, materialism, and militarism, which it sedulously fostered. Already coming events were casting their shadows before, and this feeling was predominant throughout the meetings. At the very outset we were reminded by the President that "we had wars, and rumours of wars everywhere, often wanton, wicked, and aggressive; expenditure on war preparations always leaping up, and now enormous, ruinous, and absolutely useless. They had had great surpluses year by year but no remission of taxation. One worthless battleship which could neither sail nor fight, wasted more money than would make secondary education a blessing to the whole English nation. But there

was no help for the people, although there had been money enough for wholesale bribery to the Tory supporters. They had jingoism preached from very high places; they had the constant acquisition of land and of gold held out as the one end and aim of political existence; and their own Party was not quite free from this reproach. They had the gospel of militarism preached from very high places: money, not measures: 'will this reform put a penny in your pockets?' Had these preachers forgotten that the measures which their great ancestors fought for and won, the measures of which Englishmen were the proudest, were not the measures which put pennies into their pockets, but measures, such as the Emancipation of the slaves in Jamaica, which took money out to redeem the good name of their country; and the results of this petty material preaching were the wicked wars which had been spoken of, the tampering with the liberty of the press in India, the open avowal of the necessity of immorality in their dealings with other nations. Matters could be done with impunity by the Tories now which twenty-five years ago would have aroused a thrill of indignation from the North to the South, from the East to the West. The Tory slave circular was put out in 1875 and, in three weeks, the whole country was ablaze, and the strong Tory Government had to withdraw the slave circular. But to-day, in Cape Colony, slavery of the worst kind, under the name of forced apprenticeship, was being revived, and their Colonial Secretary had too many useless wars and troubles on his hands to attend to such a little humanitarian business as that of slavery."

Mr Augustine Birrell spoke of the growing militarism of the age, and of Mr Goschen's delight at the growth of the Naval Estimates from nine and a half millions in 1872 to twenty-four millions, which he now asked for. "So enthusiastic did Mr Goschen become in the course of his speech that he said, with

a strain of almost epic glory, "We have not yet attained the standard of perfection; our ideas have not been realised." What strange words were those to be used in connection with a thing which, even if it were necessary, ought to be to all of us a thought of humiliation and of shame. Mr Birrell hoped that the Liberal Party would not become intoxicated by those trappings of war, but would remember that its true function was to bring about the distant day when war should have disappeared altogether.

Sir Walter Foster spoke with intense earnestness in favour of retrenchment and against the policy of expansion of the Empire. "In these days of Jingoism, in these days of expansion of the Empire, in these days of the tawdry tinsel talk of trade following the flag, and all the chatter of that kind, they might go back for a few minutes to consider an old formula that used to stir the country, that stirred it to great uses and purposes, the formula of 'Peace, Retrenchment, and Reform.' Above all things they wanted the first of those great objects kept before the eyes of the people."

Mr (now Sir) W. S. Robson, in a powerful speech, condemning "the present Government of any peace with the strong, qualified with war at any price with the weak," moved, "That this Council deplores the results which have as a whole attended the Foreign, Colonial, and Indian policy of the Government—a policy of alternately bullying the weak and making graceful concessions to the strong, which, since the accession of Lord Salisbury to office, has given rise to an unparalleled series of crises and complications, involving an expenditure on armaments beyond all precedent, and seriously compromising the honour and interests of the country."

At the close of the meeting on the first day the Chairman proposed to send the following resolution to our grand old Leader who was just returning home for the last time: "To the Right Honourable W. E.

Gladstone. We, the Members of the National Liberal Federation in Annual Meeting at Leicester assembled, desire to greet you on your return home, and assure you, that, as in Auld Lang Syne, you hold the supreme place in our confidence and affection."

The great public meeting in the Floral Hall, which had been specially fitted up and decorated for the occasion, and which was crowded by more than 5000 people, was addressed by Mr John Morley, M.P., who was received with the greatest enthusiasm.

After a few words upon criticisms of the Federation and of the Party Leaders, he quoted one of the attacks of a Liberal newspaper which had struck him very much. "Under the guidance of these self-seeking and incapable heads, the great Party of Reform has been allowed to go to wreck and ruin. It has no programme, it has no leader, it has no enthusiasm. If therefore there be any longer intelligent and zealous politicians in the Party especially identified with Liberalism (this is a friend speaking), an opportunity now presents itself for them to assert themselves, and to take up the reins which have fallen from the nerveless hands of those who have proved themselves incompetent to guide the Party coach." "That (Mr Morley continued) is very faithful dealing you will admit. Of this at all events I am sure, that when some future historian of the Party in this country comes to write the record, he will say that at any rate Sir William Harcourt and his colleagues stuck to the ship with dogged pluck in foul weather as in fair, that they were not frightened either by storms or by what in the old days of sailing ships were even worse, dead calms; and that some day or other justice will be done to them for having adhered, in spite of gloomy skies, to the principles and the programme which I know well that every one of you is anxious to further. I am not to-night going through the items of the Newcastle Programme, but I am not going to turn my back upon a single one of those

items." He then went on to speak of Temperance Reform, the House of Lords, and Home Rule, but the chief theme of his noble speech was that which had been most in evidence at the Council Meetings, the threatening state of foreign affairs. "Last year," he said, "in the joyful commemoration of the Jubilee, we thought that all was going well. But, so in 1851, when there was the Great International Exhibition, everybody thought then too that everything was going well. Yet that was followed by the calamitous episode of the Crimean War. Let us take care that our rejoicings in 1897 may not be followed by something as calamitous." He spoke of "the crisis in our national and Imperial fortunes," of which the *Times* newspaper had written. "You find men out of Bedlam talk as though we could undertake at once war with Russia for Port Arthur, war with France about West Africa, war with President Kruger about the Transvaal, war to smash the tribes on the North West Frontier of India, and war to smash the tribes on the Nile. These five simultaneous operations are proposed by men out of Bedlam. I think that is a crisis." He then quoted Lord Salisbury, who said, "There is a danger of the old doctrine of fifty years ago that we ought to fight everybody and take everything;" that doctrine he was sorry to say, was associated with a Liberal Minister, Lord Palmerston, but died down under the influence of what was called "the Manchester School," which meant two of the most patriotic men that ever lived, Cobden and Bright. "Let us be sure that, in view of the present crisis, the Liberal Party is awake to the importance of cherishing and adhering at all Party costs to doctrines which were an honour to it in its best days and under it best Leaders." And then came a sentence which was pregnant with prophetic truth, and which we are feeling the force of in this country most strongly today, "I will tell you another element of the crisis, and that is the power which, certainly in the Government of India, and in too many other fields as well,

the soldier possesses," and he condemned with great force the argument for further Indian wars which Lord Roberts had just brought forward. He pointed out that Lord Roberts acknowledged "there is one point of view from which I have not discussed the question, and that is the financial point of view." "The moment he said this the whole of his laboriously constructed fabric came down with a crash." Mr Morley went on to discuss with great force the difficulties which had arisen between the French and English in West Africa, and the strange choice of Sir Frederick Lugard as the Commander of the black force, and especially the speech which he had made on the eve of his departure, which he criticised as "improper and unwise, and as high-handed as any speech I ever read in my life." And then followed a noble appeal for peace between France and England. "Is it right, is it rational, is it credible, is it tolerable, that two nations, each with centuries of glorious history behind it, each rivalling the other as France and England do, and both together surpassing all the nations in all the world besides in what they have done for human freedom and enlightenment, that these two nations, after eighty years of unbroken peace, should once more turn their backs upon their best selves and once more tread the barbarous and bloody path of war?" and he ended this passage by another quotation from Lord Salisbury, expressing the hope that his Government would not forget his admirable words, "All the great triumphs of civilization in the past have been in the substitution of judicial doctrine for the cold, cruel arbitrament of war. We have got rid of private war between small magnate and large magnate in this country, we have got rid of the duel between man and man, and we are slowly, as far as we can, substituting arbitration for struggles in international disputes."

It is interesting to note that, at the Annual breakfast to Liberal Secretaries and Agents, the same feeling of coming trouble seemed largely to prevail,

and Mr Morley advised those he addressed to be on their guard in the discussions of the day as to the extraordinary vacillations of the public mind and of our public instructors, as to our attitude in respect of all the various complications with foreign powers which at present we were all so anxious about. Violent and diametrically contradictory moods had swept over the Press of this country during the past three or four or six months, as the alternations of black cloud and friendly sunshine sweep over our March sky. These were an element of danger, and it was important that those who were closely and responsibly brought into contact with the organizations in this country, whenever the chance occurred and whatever that chance might be, should do all that in them lies to steady the public mind, and to make it considerate and provident when these trying occasions and emergencies arise.

Death of Mr Gladstone

The year which followed the meeting at Leicester was one of unusual seriousness in the history of the Liberal Party. The message from that gathering to our great Leader, Mr Gladstone, had been despatched on the 22nd March, and, in less than two months, on 19th May, he passed quietly and peacefully away at Hawarden. The ceremonies attendant upon his interment, the Lying in State in Westminster Hall, and the public funeral in Westminster Abbey, were properly of a National character, but before the Hall was closed to the public, there was a procession of Liberals from all parts of the United Kingdom, organised and headed by the Officials of the National Liberal Federation, to bid farewell to their beloved Leader. It was a remarkable and touching demonstration, and, in common with the whole of the proceedings, it was pathetic, in a high sense and in a special way, beyond any occasion in the lives of the oldest of us to which the adjective "pathetic" can be applied. The

reverent passing through Westminster Hall, in the centre of which stood the bier whereon lay the body of him whom we had followed so faithfully and loved so well, the mourners kneeling round the remains through the silent night watches, the funeral in Westminster Abbey, were not simply ceremonies of a specially solemn kind; there was throughout and on the part of all alike a feeling of deep and irretrievable loss such as is known at the graveside of a beloved friend. Class and Party were forgotten. Prince, Peer and Peasant, alike gathered to pay the last evidences of respect to one who was respected, and justly so, as few men ever have been, and the majesty of the good man's noble life brought all together in a singularly close union of hearts. This is not the place to do more than note the deep interest which Mr Gladstone had ever taken in the Federation since upon the day of its birth he sent it on its way rejoicing. To him it had shown the true loyalty which supports in the time of need but does not hesitate to differ when the time seems to demand conscientious, but respectful and kindly, difference. Such difference never causes ill feeling. It is but an evidence of the truth of the old lines, "The falling out of faithful friends renewing is of love."

The Executive Committee of the Federation invited the co-operation of all the Liberal organizations in the country in promoting a national memorial to our great chief, and subscriptions were strictly limited in amount to £1, £6000 being contributed from more than eighty thousand subscribers in every part of the United Kingdom. A statue has been erected in the House of Commons, and the balance of the money has established an annual Gladstone Memorial Prize at the Universities of Oxford, Cambridge, and London, and at the University Colleges in England, Scotland, and Wales, for special proficiency in history, political science, and economics, so that every year Mr Gladstone's memory is recog-

nised in a very practical way. Perhaps this is the best of all forms of memorials to men of real greatness.

The incalculable value of Mr Gladstone's life to this country was forcibly shown by the passing of the Irish Local Government Act in the Session of 1898. In 1886 Lord Randolph Churchill, then an official Parliamentary Leader, had declared that in the treatment of the three Kingdoms there should be similarity, simultaneity, and equality. This was after the great Home Rule Bill had passed the House of Commons and had been rejected by the House of Lords. Tory promises are apt to be somewhat delayed in the performance. In 1888 England and Wales, and in 1889 Scotland, each got its Local Government Act. It was strange simultaneity to put off poor Ireland's claims for twelve years, during the first ten of which the power of performance was entirely in the Tories' hands. But the Irish Local Government Act was the direct result of Mr Gladstone's splendid Home Rule campaign. But for that it would in all probability never have entered into the Tory mind to do anything for Ireland in the direction of Local Government, or, at least, the kind of thing which they might possibly have contemplated was well shown by the ridiculous fiasco of 1892. The Act of 1898 was really a tribute to Mr Gladstone by a foe beaten in every moral aspect of the case; it was a declaration on the part of the whole Tory Party that they had either disputed Home Rule on grounds which they knew were untenable or that they had been convinced that their opposition to it was wrong. Lord Salisbury had pointed out, in 1883, that to treat Ireland on an equality with England must lead to Home Rule, and in 1885 that Home Rule was less dangerous than Local Self-government. If the Irish people, as the dis-unionists alleged, were unfitted for the task of government, and would, if they had the necessary power, certainly oppress those who differed in re-

ligious faith from the majority, then Lord Salisbury was right in his second view, and time will prove that his first statement was also accurate.

How small the modicum of Tory constructive reform which has not been either borrowed or stolen from the Liberals; their Education and Licensing Acts are retrogressions, not reforms.

But I need not spend more time upon that Session of 1898 which the *Times* newspaper stated was, by universal consent, to be reckoned as the dullest and least interesting within the experience of the great body of Members of Parliament.

There is more to note in Foreign affairs. It was in this year that the Soudan war or massacre resulted in bringing that ineligible land within the sphere of civilization. I do not for a moment deny that a more orderly rule has been set up there, and that certain abuses have been put down. The wealthier travelling public have been provided with another extremely uninteresting place to visit, though scarcely one of sojourn, but I deny altogether that the gain can be put into the balance as against the reckless and enormous slaughter of human beings mercilessly and cruelly carried out. The tyranny of the Mahdi was great and barbaric, but we called him uncivilized, and where his tyranny affected some scores of persons our slaughter affected hundreds.

Then followed the Fashoda incident, which would have passed away without a word in all probability, but for the English and French Press. Both for some time were sources of great anxiety to the wise people in their respective countries. If anyone hereafter wishes to see how the Jingo instinct can breed brutality in men of apparent refinement, let him take down *Punch* at the time of the Fashoda incident, and look at the large cartoon representing France as the player of a hurdy-gurdy and the French Army as the poodle dancing to the music. Anything more absolutely mischievous and idiotic probably never appeared in any illustrated paper. *Punch* has long

ceased to amuse the multitude, but it might be expected to have some regard to its fame in the old days when "it ne'er carried a heartstain away on its blade." But even the execrably bad taste which struck the French people on their most susceptible point, could not happily bring about the iniquity of a war between England and France.

Perhaps I need only mention further, in Foreign affairs, the fact that Admiral Noel, acting on his own initiative, ended the great difficulty which had arisen with reference to the Island of Crete, and gave it possession of its long promised autonomy, the Turkish troops being turned out of the Island and Prince George of Greece constituted its Governor.

But in December of this year, 1898, the Liberal Party received what might have proved a knockdown blow from within its own ranks. Indeed it would have been of most serious consequence had not the General Committee of the Federation taken a calm, wise, and dignified view of the situation, and, by so doing, given a lead which was followed throughout the country.

Retirement of Leaders

On the 13th December 1898 a correspondence between Sir William Harcourt and Mr John Morley was published in the newspapers which showed that Sir William Harcourt had resigned the post of Leader of the Liberals in the House of Commons, and wished thenceforward to become an independent and private Member. There was no direct explanation of the reasons which had led to this step. The letters stated that "a Party ruined by sectional disputes and personal interests is one which no man can consent to lead either with credit to himself or advantage to the country." And it also stated that Sir William Harcourt "would not consent to be a candidate for any

contested position, and that a disputed leadership, beset by distracted sections and conflicting interests, is an impossible situation." Mr Morley's letter showed that he took a similar view as to the position of matters in the Party, and that he entirely sympathised with the feelings which had led Sir William Harcourt to retire from the Leadership. Shortly afterwards Mr Morley, in addressing his constituents, announced that he had withdrawn from all formal participation in the counsels or direction of the Liberal Party, as a protest against what he alleged to be the growing tendency in Liberalism to become identified with Jingoism.

On 16th December the General Committee of the Federation met at Birmingham and the following resolution was carried: "That this Committee has read with deep regret Sir William Harcourt's resignation of his position as Leader of the Liberal Party in the House of Commons, in whose life, since Mr Gladstone's retirement, he has been the most prominent figure. This Committee hereby tenders to him its heartfelt thanks for his long and brilliant services to the Liberal cause both in prosperity and in adversity, and rejoices to know that he will continue to devote his pre-eminent powers to the promotion of those great principles of which he has been a fearless and consistent advocate."

I do not think that I can with advantage say more upon this subject, which is still to many of us a very painful one. The blow was unexpected and severe. We had little time in which to think matters over. Among the rank and file of the Party differences had begun to show themselves, especially on questions of foreign policy, but no one ever dreamed that the differences were to end in the withdrawal of two of our most highly esteemed Leaders in whom the vast majority of the Party placed unbounded confidence. I cannot but regret that the incident ever occurred.

Sir Henry Campbell-Bannerman elected Leader

I may perhaps note in conclusion that the Liberal Members, on the day before the opening of the Session of 1899, met and elected Sir Henry Campbell-Bannerman as Sir William Harcourt's successor. Events have abundantly justified the choice.

Annual Meeting at Hull, 1899

When the Federation met at Hull on 7th March 1899, one of its first duties was to pass a cordial vote of congratulation to the Liberal Party upon Sir Henry Campbell-Bannerman's election to the Leadership of the Opposition in the House of Commons, and assuring him and Lord Kimberley of the hearty support of the Liberals in the constituencies. The report which was laid before the meeting stated, amongst other things, that the new Leader in the House of Commons had already made it clear that he intended to lead his followers in the fighting spirit in which they desired to be led.

The meeting was naturally not a little clouded by the fact that, during the year which had passed since the gathering at Leicester, the great Leader of our Party had been called to rest. Sir William Harcourt and Mr John Morley had, for the time at all events, resigned their leading positions in the Party, and very recently death had removed one of the greatest of Lord Chancellors, and a faithful adherent to Liberal principles, Lord Herschell. The feeling which had been prevalent at Leicester was even perhaps more marked at Hull, that is to say, the feeling of undefined but approaching peril. In the discussion upon the Report the point of the retirement of Sir William Harcourt and Mr John Morley was touched upon. The President stated that Mr Morley's subsequent speech at Brechin swept through the world of Liberal politics like a bracing breeze. The

laying-down of the task of leadership was perhaps scarcely just to the rank and file. There were differences amongst them, and differences had to be faced. Differences were characteristic of—almost the very life-breath of—the Liberal Party, but there was undoubtedly a wide distinction between differences on matters of domestic policy, and differences on questions of Foreign Policy. Such matters, for example, as the Soudan war, which many of them held to have been not merely needless but useless, and contrary to the principles of true morality which were as binding upon nations as upon individuals; here was a real difference, and one which could not and should not lightly be set aside. Then the Tory Imperialist view was spoken of, and the speaker said that Statesmen often seemed to him to think that they were making history when they were only making messes. The Tory Imperialist view was that of always making the Empire bigger, the true Liberal view was that of making the Empire better. People talked much about the continuity of Foreign Policy, but surely the first question was whether the policy to be continued was right or wrong.

The differences which, before a year had passed, showed themselves so strongly in the Liberal Party were already beginning to give much concern to those in that Party who looked forward. Already at this meeting a warning was given by a workingman Member of Parliament, that there was a limit to the taxable capacity of any nation, and that they must be prepared to take their stand against, and resist, the encroachment of militarism.

The Hague Conference

There was a resolution passed at the second meeting welcoming "the proposals of the Tzar of Russia for assuring a real and lasting peace, and above all things for the fixing of a limit to the progressive development of armament," and urging "Her Majesty's

Government to give instructions to the representatives of this country at the forthcoming Conference to use their most strenuous efforts to bring its deliberations to a practical and satisfactory conclusion." We all know the history of the Hague Conference, and most of us are glad to hold that, whatever the actual result may have been, a step was then taken in the direction of the settlement of International disputes by arbitration rather than by war, which placed in a new position altogether the doctrine that, in spite of all the military practices of the great nations, the true way of settling disputes between them was by peace and not by force of arms. The fact of the Conference was really an acknowledgment and admission of this.

The Public Meeting was addressed by Sir Henry Campbell-Bannerman, who had a great reception from more than 4,000 people, and his speech was an admirable one. Touching upon the question of peace and militarism, he said, "The greatest of British interests is peace. Yes, but that does not advance us much, for how is peace to be secured? I should say by pursuing a policy towards our neighbours of firmness, of moderation, and of common sense; I am sure not by either arrogance or weakness, and least of all by alternation of the one with the other. We hear a great deal in these days of Imperialism, and there are men who seem to think that by calling themselves Imperialists they add another cubit to their stature. But the meaning of the word varies indefinitely according to the disposition of the man who uses it. We Liberals, whilst abjuring the vulgar bastard Imperialism of irritation and provocation and aggression, of clever tricks and manœuvres against neighbours and of grabbing everything, are not afraid of the responsibilities of Empire, and we are proud to be the guardians of the heritage handed down by our fathers."

I must quote his concluding words, for they remain for ever true. His speech had dealt with both

domestic and foreign policy, and he did not shrink from any one of the difficulties which were before the country. He ended by saying, "Now, gentlemen, these instances will have sufficed to show you how we are doing our duty to the best of our power in the House of Commons. The proceedings of the last few days show that you in your sphere are alive to your duty. Let us confidently labour, each in our own way, in the good cause, knowing it is not for individuals, it is not even for a Party that we are striving, not for a Party as such,—it is for the predominance in the public polity of our country of justice and freedom, and of the spirit of righteousness upon which alone the prosperity and welfare of a people can be surely based."

Before the year 1899 closed the Government had plunged this country into a disastrous war, from the effects of which it is still suffering, and will long suffer morally and materially. Well might the report which was presented at the following Annual Meeting held at Nottingham say that "it is a strong instance of the irony of events that within a few months of a Peace Conference, held on Dutch soil, in which this country took a leading part, we should find ourselves at war with two Dutch republics."

THE TRANSVAAL WAR

Into the history of that war I shall not enter. I am rather concerned with the manner in which it affected the Liberal Party and the Federation. I do not think that the Government, as a whole at all events, deliberately planned the war. I am sure that they were ready to take unwarrantable risks upon the supposition that the Boers could be bluffed. I fully recognise that, in the actual act of declaring war, the Transvaal Government made a mistake which furnished an excuse for those of our own Party who had strong Imperialist tendencies, and who were very willing to be convinced of the absolute

justice of the position which this country was made to assume. But, on the other hand, from the time of the Jameson Raid it had been abundantly evident that at least one member of the Government had resolved upon altering the relative positions of the Transvaal and the Orange River Free State and this country. Every step taken shows that this was the case. The Conference between Lord Milner and President Kruger was not that of two men who wished to arrive at a peaceable conclusion upon the matters in dispute, but of the man whose imperiousness showed that he felt he had the Government of a great country behind him, and that he was dealing with an altogether inferior person whom he could safely bully because, under no circumstances, would his antagonist act aggressively in self-defence. This indeed was what "all the men who knew best" advised the Government. "The Boers would not fight, the old spirit had died out of them; if they did rise and a few scores of them were shot, the rest would go home, and the affair would be over." The reports sent to the Government by their own Intelligence Department were not read by its members, and when war broke out and it was seen how convincingly they showed the inexcusable and criminal negligence of the Members of the Government, the reports were burked and their issue stopped. One man, indeed, Sir William Butler, warned the Ministers of the nature of the task they were undertaking, but his warning was disregarded and he was cashiered: "but when ill indeed, e'en dismissing the doctor don't always succeed." In the meantime troops were being accumulated in South Africa, and arrangements were being made for having 20,000 men there ready for action, under the notion that their very presence would awe the Boers into submission. There seemed also to be an impression on the part of the Government that their antagonists would not learn what was going on until it was too late. Thus, although the declaration of war must be looked upon

as the beginning of hostilities, yet any independent person must recognise that the preparations made by our Government to awe, or, if necessary, to crush the Boers, though ludicrously inadequate for the purpose, were in reality overt acts of war.

No matter what the war may be, the nation which wages it never stops to inquire whether it is necessary or just. It takes it for granted that it must be both because it is its war. Indeed, with the Tory Government, the only question in International difficulties seems to have been whether we were powerful enough to beat our opponents. Where we were not, no Government was ever more ready to make graceful concessions; where we were, the war was just and inevitable. The war fever seized upon the British nation in a malignant form. It was perhaps worst amongst those who were known as the upper classes, but the working men greatly disappointed those of us who believed when we were fighting for the extension of the franchise to Boroughs and Counties, that we were taking a step which would go a considerable way towards a more peaceful method of dealing with International disputes than that which was usually adopted. With the open connivance of the Government, our free constitution was frequently suspended, the right of free speech was denied, the right of open public meeting was also denied, the war party made frequent resort to personal violence against those who differed from them conscientiously, private property was invaded and wantonly destroyed. With very few, but those brilliant, exceptions, the public press of the whole country reflected the savage and vindictive conduct of the great majority of all classes in the country. We soon saw how slight was the hold upon the popular action and belief of the great principles upon which popular liberty depends. The fact that the vast majority of a free people can be as cruel and as tyrannical as any despot was painfully exemplified in the wild preachings of mad Imperialists, some of whom were men of high authority,

many of whom were ministers of religion, and embracing all creeds and all parties alike. The English character for sobriety, fairness, and moderation disappeared, and, culminating on Mafeking night, the wildest orgies of the most reckless semi-barbarous people were witnessed in all parts of our land. In the Metropolis perhaps it was the very worst. Thoughtful men saw, in the sweeping away of every barrier of law and order, how London, conspicuously, but every large English town also, contains the elements of a rising which might have results more terrible by far than those of the famous French Revolution. That this should have been made evident to the worst elements in such a possible rising is to be laid entirely at the door of the Members, and the leading Members, of the Tory Government, not excluding the then Prime Minister himself.

But the Liberal Party is not without part and lot in the shame. If it had remained firm to the great principles of popular freedom, the war might have been prevented, and even, when begun, its worst features might have been averted. The Christian bodies and Christian ministers, with only individual exceptions, succumbed to the power of Moloch and hounded on the dogs of war.

THE WAR: ANNUAL MEETING, NOTTINGHAM, 1900

At the Annual meeting of the Council of the Federation at Nottingham in March 1900, it became plainly evident that, so far as the representatives present were concerned, there was a strong diversity of opinion respecting the war. At the meeting of the Council as well as at the public meeting, it was clear that the majority of those present were opposed to hostilities, but, especially amongst those who might fairly be called the more intellectual portion of the representatives, there were many influential

men who took an altogether different view. There were also a considerable number who counselled, rightly, moderation in all action taken by the Federation, and concession on the respective sides. But this was clearly a case in which there could be no concession. It was a case of conscientious belief when neither side could fairly be expected to give way until thoroughly convinced of its mistake. The time was indeed a serious one both for the Federation and the Party. The decision of the course of procedure to be adopted was one of supreme difficulty, and was only arrived at after deep consideration and much anxiety which might fairly be described as painful. It was, however, an occasion on which nothing could be gained by trimming, although many persons thought otherwise. There could be no advantage in crying, "Peace, Peace, when there is no peace." It was better, and indeed it always is better, where great differences clearly exist, to acknowledge them fairly and to meet them openly, and to get as far as may be to their real and exact nature. This was a time for the application by both sides of Herbert Spencer's dictum: "The highest truth that the wise man sees let him fearlessly utter, knowing that, if he attain the end he aims at, well; if not, well also, though not so well." But though concession was not possible, consideration was. During the years of the war perhaps the greatest difficulty which the earnest men on either side in our Party had was to give the other side credit for the same conscientiousness which they claimed for themselves. But, upon the whole, the ties of old comradeship were not forgotten, and we differed, as Sir Edward Grey said, not as foes, but as those who had been, who would be, and who were, in spite of differences, still friends. It must never be forgotten that the war fever is a very subtle disease, and, like every disease, invades the cottages of the poor and the palaces of the rich. Everything appears for the moment to be thrown out of

proportion. For the time, calmness of view and the considerations which, on ordinary occasions, influence men, are exchanged for the delusive dreams characteristic of severe disease. To those who were opposed to the war the situation was often terrible. Everything which they had been striving for throughout their lives, every step which seemed to have been gained, every victory won, apparently with the concurrence of the entire Liberal Party, appeared to be thrown away. The reign of evil was complete, and yet, those of us who could look back to the Crimean War, and who could remember the fate of the few and unimportant meetings held to advocate the cause of peace, took heart of grace, even in the darkest hour of the Transvaal war, from the fact that for one Liberal who avowedly opposed the first, there were one hundred who avowedly opposed the second.

I may have to allude from time to time to the question of this war, but I have already explained that I shall not do this in detail, and, speaking of the Nottingham Council so far as the hostilities were concerned, I will only say further that, acting upon the course which those who were responsible believed was the wise and true one, the whole matter was fully, and I hope fairly, gone into. I may possibly have to comment upon certain aspects of the question, but I now return to the general history of the Federation. In the report which was laid before the Annual meeting at Nottingham special allusion was made to the death of Mr Thomas Ellis, who had been chief Liberal Whip since 1894, and it was noted that the Liberal Party and the whole progressive cause in England, no less than the National movement in his own country of Wales, lost in him one who had already shown unusually great capacity for public service, and from whom much was hoped and much was expected. His memory will long be cherished with affection and gratitude by all those who care for the principles

and the cause to which it may be said, without exaggeration, that he gave his life.

The year with which the report dealt also saw the release, after a long illness, of Mr Schnadhorst, the first Secretary of the Federation, who held that office for sixteen years. In fact with the establishment of our Association he was largely concerned, and his extraordinary powers of organization and the confidence that all who knew him instinctively placed in his judgment, contributed more than any other cause to the success which the Federation has attained. He was altogether an exceptional man and had an unusual hold upon the esteem and goodwill of Liberals throughout the land. For some time before his death he had been in precarious health, and had finally retired from the service of the Federation (as already noted) in the year 1894. I must again speak of our good fortune in having our present Secretary, Mr R. A. Hudson (now Sir Robert Hudson), to succeed him, one who had been associated with him in the work of the Federation from its early years, and whose energy, ability, and tact, have preserved and extended the best traditions of the office.

One of the questions dealt with in the Annual Report was the completion of the Memorial of the Liberal Party to its great Leader, Mr Gladstone. The individual subscriptions ranged from 1d. to £1, but more than £1 was not given, and, as a consequence, there were over 80,000 subscribers. The statue, which was erected in the Central Lobby of the Houses of Parliament, Mr F. W. Pomeroy being the sculptor entrusted with the task of executing the work, was unveiled, on the second anniversary of Mr Gladstone's death, by Sir Henry Campbell-Bannerman, in the presence of many members of Mr Gladstone's family, nearly all the members of his last Ministry, many of his political opponents, and a large representation of both Houses of Parliament, as well as the general public. Sir Henry concluded his brief and eloquent remarks on the occasion

with the words, "May this statue stand here at the very gate of the House of Commons, showing to every man who passes in, whether a member or an aspirant or a student, or only an interested visitor, the noble figure and face of our great statesman, and may it serve as each man looks upon it, and may the same service be done to us, to instil into every one something of that exalted spirit of duty, of generosity, of righteousness, and of faith, which in his lifetime radiated from Mr Gladstone."

The report pointed out that no measure of real political importance had been passed into law since the preceding Annual Report was presented, with the exception of the London Municipalities Act, which swept away the Vestries and replaced them by the Metropolitan Borough Councils. This was a distinct and deliberate attempt to weaken, and perhaps to smash, the London County Council, but the Liberal Party succeeded in so altering it in Committee that the dreaded mischief was frustrated. The Parliamentary year however was marked by the Government suddenly introducing in June the Clerical Tithes Bill which had not been mentioned in the Queen's Speech, and it was pushed through by the force of the great Tory majority. This measure has really established a fresh endowment of the Church. It was simply a dole given by the ministry to some of their principal supporters, and was bad even from the point of view of many Churchmen as it gave most assistance to those of the clergy who were least in need of it.

I should notice that this year the Licensing Commission presented its Reports, both the majority and the minority of the Commission reporting separately. This is, perhaps, now chiefly remarkable from the fact that neither report in the opinion of Her Majesty's Ministers was sufficiently favourable to their other friends, the publicans, and both have been ignored. At the time of the Nottingham Meeting Sir Henry Campbell-Bannerman was ill,

and, practically at a moment's notice, Sir Edward Grey undertook to address a great public meeting in his place. It was not an easy task, but he discharged it with much ability and tact, and the great kindness and self-sacrifice he had shown in coming to Nottingham on such an occasion and at such short notice, was gratefully appreciated. His reception by the gathering of something like 4000 people was indeed enthusiastic. Let me quote what he said about Sir Henry Campbell-Bannerman: "Let me say that in his absence at any rate we have an opportunity of expressing our sentiments towards him. He has had to fill a position which was not of his own seeking, and which is one of very great difficulty. It is a position which was not favourably reported upon by his predecessor, and I do not know that the difficulties with which Sir Henry Campbell-Bannerman has had to deal have been less than those with which Sir William Harcourt had to deal before him. If he had been here to-night you would have given him a splendid recognition of the labour and devotion with which he has discharged his task; and let me add this, that had anyone else been in the position, a man of less self-sacrifice or a man less devoted to trying to preserve the unity of the Party, I am not sure that by this time there might not have been a split which was beyond recall and beyond repair. We owe gratitude to Sir Henry Campbell Bannerman that he has made great sacrifices, and has made those sacrifices with success."

Both in Sir Edward Grey's speech and in those which followed thanking him for the effort, there was strong evidence of the great desire that the undoubted differences in the Party upon the question of the right or wrong of the war should not be permitted to develop into a Party split. It was urged for both sides that they could not and would not give up their conscientious convictions, but they were reminded of their old comradeship, of the battles they had fought side by side in the days which were past, and the

attles they were to fight side by side in the days to come. They were learning a great deal in such meetings as those which they had held in Nottingham, and, as will be shortly seen, the feeling in the Party constantly grew that, whatever differences there might be amongst the Leaders, whatever attempts there might be to found Leagues outside of the Federation, the rank and file of the Party were and would be united in the determination to preserve the unity of the Party even though it often was to be "not like to like but like in difference."

In looking back at that time and at the meeting which immediately followed, I may fairly put it upon record that I am convinced that the course which the Federation pursued, of dealing with things as they were and not in any way attempting to make them appear other than they were, was the right and true course, and the only one which prevented a breach which could never have been healed.

At the breakfast to the Agents, which was given on the joint invitation of the Chief Liberal Whip and the President of the Federation, Mr Herbert Gladstone made a striking speech, pointing out that it was exceedingly probable that the Government and the Conservative Members would be only too glad to see a General Election fought on the question of the war, with attention concentrated on the questions arising out of the war upon which there was considerable difference of opinion in our Party, and diverted from the great social questions upon which the whole of the Liberal Party was united, and in respect of which that Party had an undoubted and large majority in the country. He believed, however, that the country at large would resent what they would think to be a trick for Party purposes.

General Election, 1900

He was quite right as to the General Election, which came in the autumn of 1900, but unfortunately the

nation accepted the view, which was industriously put forward by the Government, that the war was over, and that they should be returned to power in order to carry out the subsequent settlement. The Election was fought upon the war and upon the war only. The Dissolution was upon a stale register. It was carefully explained by Mr Chamberlain that every seat lost to the Government was a seat gained by the Boers, and the Leaders of the Tory Party were faithfully followed by the rank and file in making the declaration that, whatever the views of electors might be upon questions of domestic policy, such had nothing to do with this special Election, and that the war and the settlement of the war were the only matters upon which their votes would be called for.

The entire falsehood of the declarations made by the Government ought surely to prove a lesson to every Liberal elector that it is nothing short of political suicide to act upon the most solemn promises made by Tory Ministers or Members.

The triumph which the Tory Party obtained they abused to reverse, upon questions which are of vital importance to the country, the policy which had been initiated and carried through by preceding Liberal Governments. That Tory caucus, the House of Lords, has, when the Liberals have been in power, made much play with the doctrine of mandate. This is a modern doctrine which is quite without authority. If, indeed, all important questions must be submitted to the country before they passed through Parliament, not only questions of domestic policy, but no war could be declared without a popular vote in its favour, the fact that no vote on any important question had been taken would be fatal. It may be that such a provision is desirable, but it does not exist. But whatever our views upon this question may be, the vital matters which the Tory Government and majority have unsettled are not only such as they had no popular mandate to meddle with, but

are in direct contradiction to the solemn pledges upon which they were returned to power. They are therefore devoid of authority.

Death of Queen Victoria

I should mention that, during the year of the Federation which followed the Nottingham meeting, Queen Victoria died, and the Executive Committee of the Federation passed the following resolution, which was approved and adopted by the General Committee of the Federation at its meeting held at Rugby on the 27th February 1901: "That this Executive Committee of the National Liberal Federation desires, on behalf of the affiliated Associations of England and Wales, to express its deep sense of the loss the Nation has sustained in the death of Her Majesty Queen Victoria. During the whole of her long and glorious reign she endeared herself to her people by her loyal adherence to the Constitution, by her heartfelt love of peace and justice, by her stainless life and her never-failing sympathy with all classes of her subjects, and she has bequeathed to them for all time the supreme example of a great Monarch and a noble woman. The Committee desires to offer its respectful sympathy with the members of the Royal family in their great sorrow, and to assure His Majesty the King and His Royal Consort of the loyalty and regard in which they are held by all those upon whose behalf this Committee is permitted to speak." In the report the words are added that "the Committee feel in desiring for His Majesty the King a long, happy, and prosperous reign, they can express no higher wish than that he may follow in the steps of his venerated mother, and gain for himself the same measure of respect and affection which for nearly sixty-four years were so willingly rendered to her."

A few weeks after the Nottingham meeting the Officers and Executive Committee sent out a circular

to the affiliated Associations. It declared that "while the Annual meeting made it plain that, on some aspects of the war in South Africa, there is considerable difference of opinion within the Liberal Party, it was also demonstrated at Nottingham that, in this matter, Liberals can agree to differ, being at the same time resolved to unite on the many other questions where no differences arise amongst us. The unanimity which marked the proceedings at the Second Session of the Council was striking and significant. Liberals were never more at one than they are to-day on those questions of domestic and social reform which divide the two great Parties in the State. On subjects like Registration and Electoral Reform, the House of Lords, the Land-laws, Temperance, Religious Equality and the Housing of the Working Classes, Popular Control of Elementary Schools, and on many other issues, the Liberal Party is as keen and united in favour of reform as the Conservative Party is resolute and agreed against it. The Executive Committee invite your Association to strive to the utmost that this unity on general political issues shall not be impaired by differences of opinion connected with the War. The note struck at the Nottingham meeting was one of eager desire for unity, and something may be done to realise that desire if Liberals will remember that the war will come to an end, but that the Conservative Party and the vested interests remain hostile and implacable on all the great domestic reforms which it is the duty and the privilege of Liberalism to advance."

Conference of Liberal Secretaries and Agents

On 1st May 1900 a Private Conference of Liberal Secretaries and Agents was convened to consider and discuss practical points in connection with the management of Parliamentary Elections, and it was

held at the Westminster Town Hall. More than three hundred of the prominent agents of the Party attended, and the programme included the reading of short papers, chiefly of a technical character, by Election experts, and following the reading of each paper, a free discussion and explanation. It was felt, I think universally, by those present that the Conference was of the utmost practical service, as it certainly was of very great interest.

I have spoken as to the General Election held in the Autumn of 1900, and have shown that it was won upon absolutely false statements, or rather that an entirely false issue was placed before the country; the Government, in the first place, declaring that the war was over, and, in the second place, that everyone might vote in their favour because all that they wanted was power to wind up the war which they had carried out, and that other political questions were not now before the country. But I should note that, on 25th September 1900, the Officials of the Federation issued a manifesto to the Associated bodies pointing out the strange fact that Lord Salisbury had recommended the Queen to dissolve Parliament as and from that day, although this was in defiance of Tory tradition, and of the declaration of Lord Beaconsfield in 1878 that a Minister with a large majority in the House of Commons has no business to dissolve merely with the object of gaining an advantage at the polls due to transitory circumstances.

Then the circular went forward to recall the actual events of the war, and the fact that the Government were scheming that, in the achievement of a great General and a brave Army, their own negligence, miscalculations, and manifold misdoings, should be forgiven and forgotten. They pointed out how, by taking the dissolution on a stale Register without any special legislation to advance the date of the new Register, they deliberately disfranchised half a million of electors, and the circular then dealt with the shameful and humiliating Foreign Policy of the

Government in Armenia, in Greece, in India, Siam, Tunis, Madagascar and in Corea in connection with Russia.

It also reviewed the domestic policy of the Government, showing how grievously deficient it had been, that the scheme for Old Age Pensions, which was "so simple that anyone could understand it," and which any Liberal Unionist Agent was prepared to explain, had disappeared in a vanishing vista of Committees of Enquiry, how Temperance Reform had been shelved, how the scheme of Employers' Liability, which was to compensate "every man for every accident as a matter of right and certainty without the risk of litigation," had resulted in one which, though revolutionary in its character, was arbitrary and partial in its incidence, and had proved the most litigious Act of modern times. It pointed out that the one section of their policy to which the Government had devoted themselves with zeal and persistence was that of administering doles from the Public Exchequer to the classes on whose support they relied, and it advocated a firm but non-provocative policy abroad, forward social progress at home, and the provision of a strong business-like administration in all the great departments of the State, and ended "Every seat won from the Tories is a gain to the cause of the people." But although many of the strong advocates of the war had begun greatly to doubt whether their advocacy had been wise, the war fever was not yet over, and the results proved that the Government had estimated the temper of the country with great nicety. They obtained a majority of one hundred and thirty-four, or eighteen less than that at the General Election of 1895.

General Committee at Rugby

In February of 1901 the Annual meeting of the General Committee was held at Rugby, not without opposition from a certain portion of the Liberal

Party who entertained fears that grave differences might be evinced in the view which was then taken of the deplorable war in South Africa. Still the idea that, in all these matters it was better to ascertain what the truth was, prevailed in the calling of the meeting, and there was no evidence whatever of internal feud. The attendance of the delegates was the largest upon record. The resolution which was carried was spoken to by gentlemen of influence, representing every shade of opinion on the subject, and it certainly was sufficiently clear and strong. It was passed after much discussion, not on the principle of the resolution itself but upon the exact wording of it, and as it was passed it ran, "That this Committee records its profound conviction that the long continuance of the deplorable war in South Africa, declared for electioneering ends to be over last September, is due to the policy of demanding unconditional surrender, and to a want of knowledge, foresight, and judgment, on the part of the Government, who have neither demonstrated effectively to the Boers, the military supremacy of Great Britain, nor so conducted the war as to induce them to lay down their arms.

"The Committee bitterly laments the slaughter of thousands of brave men on both sides, the terrible loss of life through disease owing in no small degree to the scandalous inadequacy of the sanitary and hospital arrangements provided for our forces, and the enormous waste of resources in the actual expenditure upon the war, in the devastation of territory, and in the economic embarrassments which must inevitably follow.

"The Committee calls upon the Government to announce forthwith, and to carry out on the cessation of hostilities, a policy for the settlement of South African affairs which will secure equal rights to the white races, just and humane treatment of the natives, and such a measure of self-government as can honourably be accepted by a brave and high-spirited people."

This meeting practically removed all doubts as to the wisdom of the course which the Federation had pursued concerning the war. From this time forth, although there were from time to time difficulties more or less serious, there was nothing which indicated in any way the possibility of a split upon the matter in the Liberal Party itself.

Liberal Publication Department

It is perhaps right to say a word here about the Liberal Publication Department, which I have noted from time to time as rendering for many years conspicuous service to the Liberal Party. In the time of peace it is of great value and it does its work splendidly, but when a General Election comes its worth is simply beyond calculation. At the election of 1900 it sent out nearly one hundred different leaflets and pamphlets specially prepared for that General Election, and of those nearly twenty millions were issued in less than a month. Of picture posters sixteen were issued, of six designs, in three sizes, and nearly 175,000 were circulated. Many of these were specially drawn by Mr (now Sir) F. Carruthers Gould, and others were reproductions of what he had produced in the *Westminster Gazette*. They formed altogether what were certainly the finest and fairest set of political posters ever issued. The *Liberal Magazine* had much more than maintained its position. The October number was made a special Election one, dealing with certain aspects of the Foreign record of the Government. There was an increase in the numbers circulating month by month amongst Liberals in the constituencies who were prominent in the advocacy of Liberal principles, and indeed the Magazine had become a work of the greatest importance, and one which must be in the hands of all Liberals who took an active working interest in Political affairs. The Executive Committee reported to the Annual meeting which was

held in Bradford in May 1901, that the Committee of the Publication Department had passed the following resolution, "That this Committee hereby places on record its extreme satisfaction at the work done for the Party in the recent General Election by the Liberal Publication Department, and expresses its best thanks to Mr Birrell, Mr Geake, and all the members of the Staff of the Department, for the services they have rendered both before and during the Election."

Annual Meeting at Bradford

The Annual meeting at Bradford was one of rather special interest. It was heartily welcomed by the Conservative Mayor. The chief matters dealt with were the South African War, the constantly advancing National expenditure, and the alarming increase in the National Debt, the failure of the Government in the Education Bill to entrust the whole work of Public Education, elementary, secondary, and technical, to some one responsible and popularly elected body in each district or area, the thorough reform of the Land Laws and the extension of the system of small holdings, and adequate measures for the proper housing of the working classes alike in town and country, and Temperance reform upon the lines of Lord Peel's Minority report of the Licensing Commission.

But the great feature of the meetings was the anxious determination shown by the whole body of representatives that, in spite of the many difficulties and whatever exceptions there might be, the great mass of the Liberal Party were determined to stand closely together in the support of true Liberal principles, and to endeavour altogether to eliminate from political questions the personal element.

In considering the results of the General Election the Representatives were reminded by the President that, although it was a Khaki Election, yet it was

fought on an exceedingly bad register, and was fixed for a time when the Tories themselves believed that they were going to sweep the country. The result was really a Liberal triumph, because it must be compared, not with the state of affairs of the Tory Party in 1900, but with that in 1895. In the latter year the Tories were returned to power with a majority of 152, which in 1900 was reduced to 134. The question of the burking of Major-General Ardagh's Report, and the ignoring of it by those Ministers who got copies, were strongly dealt with. In speaking of the gallant conduct of the British soldiers, who had behaved as true Englishmen ought to behave, the question was asked, "could they withhold their meed of admiration from the two brave little nations of farmers who, for their hearths and homes, had withstood the most powerful nation in the world for so many months? Put themselves in their place. Imagine how they should feel if it was France that was doing this cruel and evil thing. Of course the big battalions would ultimately tell the accustomed tale. We might deport those captured foes to far-off lands, we might imprison defenceless women and children, we might crush two small white nations struggling for freedom, we might create a wilderness in the place of fertile land, we might make a desolation and call it Peace, but our beaten foes, not we, would receive the laurel wreath of history, and we should have done irreparable injury to our beloved mother land. For we might rest assured that, with nations as with individuals, 'he who wrongs his friend wrongs himself more.' We could not do wrong without earning and receiving the punishment of wrongdoing. We should be filled with our own devices. This had already begun; we saw it in the gradual destruction of the Parliamentary rights of our chosen representatives, we saw it in the shameful attacks in India, in Ireland, in South Africa, upon the liberty of the Press; in the unbridled licence with which Cabinet

Ministers having gagged Parliament aimed at gagging the British people; in the declaration that to criticise their actions was traitorous. 'There's none ever feared that the truth should be heard, save those whom the truth would indict.' The time had arrived to come to close quarters with such teaching, and to grapple with it to the very death. They knew how the Tories themselves had dealt with the question of Foreign policy. They had not forgotten what had happened during the Crimean War in 1854, and during the Soudan War of 1883-4. Small talk then about the continuity of Foreign Policy. But the safety and freedom of our people lay in the upholding and preserving of the very rights which the Tory Government were attacking; liberty of the Press, liberty of speech, liberty of public meeting, were far more important to the British Nation than a hundred South Africas."

Mr Thomas Burt, M.P., spoke out very clearly about the war: "An avoidable war was a crime against humanity. He himself had never disguised his own opinion about it. He told his constituents at the General Election that he regarded the war as the most disgraceful in our history. He had ventured to repeat that opinion two or three days ago in the House of Commons without a protest, without a murmur. It was a war not disgraceful to our soldiers, who bore themselves bravely as they ever did, but to our so-called Statesmen."

There was peculiar interest and advantage when the question of education was being discussed in having the presence and the assistance of Mr Alfred Illingworth, the President of the Northern Counties Education League.

A great public meeting was held in St. George's Hall, which was crowded in every part, and which was addressed by Sir Henry Campbell-Bannerman. His speech was one of remarkable ability. He was particularly happy in his review of the speeches of Members of the Government upon the war. He

himself said, "The whole country is longing for peace, and I am happy to say that I think it does not require very much special acuteness to discern a strong desire among our fellow-countrymen that, when the settlement does come, there shall be no trace in it of resentment, of vindictiveness or of anything which will perpetuate animosity. This I am convinced is the feeling and desire of the great body of our countrymen, but it is not at all a temperament or an idea congenial to the Minister who directs our Colonial affairs. You may have remarked that we sometimes obtain a truer view of an object when it is reflected than when we see it by direct vision, and the inner mind of a man may be best ascertained from some third person who is familiar with it. Such an indicator of the real meaning of the Colonial Secretary we have in Lord Selborne. He was for many years associated with the Colonial Secretary in his duties, and he was only recently translated, for urgent family reasons, to be First Lord of the Admiralty. He made a speech the other day in which he used these words. He said, "They heard a great deal of hysterical nonsense as to conciliation. His own opinion of the best course they could pursue was to proceed by gradual growth of mutual self-esteem." Mutual self-esteem! "Mutual self-esteem" is a little difficult to understand. I am neither a philologer nor a philosopher, and one would require to be a little of both to discover the real meaning of it. But this incomprehensible language is extracted from Lord Selborne under the shock with which he starts back in horror from the idea of conciliation. "Hysterical nonsense as to conciliation!" What a sentiment to come from a Minister who has been engaged in the conduct of those delicate affairs! May we not find in it the keynote of much of the policy which has been pursued? It is as if one would say, "What is the good of having enemies either in private life or in public life, or as director of Imperial affairs, if you cannot trample

upon them? We are not, however, left to the understudy because the chief actor has recently appeared upon the scene. On Friday last the Colonial Secretary addressed his nearest friends and neighbours in Birmingham. So far as that speech related to his political opponents I propose to take little notice of it. He appears to have on hand a considerable stale stock of the vituperation with which he bespattered us so freely at the General Election. The echoes of the Town Hall of Birmingham rang with "Pro-Boer" and "Little Englander," and the notorious and scandalous phrase that anyone who voted against him, forsooth, was giving a vote to the enemies of his country was repeated and insisted upon. For Party purposes I would wish nothing better than that once a week Mr Chamberlain should make a speech of this kind. But, if one has any regard for the tone of public life, for the character of the politician, and for the authority and dignity of Ministers, it is deplorable to the last degree." He dealt very fully not only with the great cost of the war, but the tremendous advance in normal expenditure. He powerfully condemned the sugar tax and pointed out that, although it was a war tax, it was introduced in order to stay, and that the war in fact had nothing to do with it or the coal tax. He then dealt with social reform, with the extraordinary skeleton Education Bill introduced by the Government, and with Temperance legislation, and finally with the great housing question. He concluded with a powerful appeal for unity, for dwelling upon the ninety-nine things upon which we are agreed rather than on the one thing upon which we are bound to differ. "We have faith in the good sense and right feeling of our countrymen. We know that they are awakening in a greater and greater degree to the fact that the full development of their happiness as individuals, and of the prosperity of the country to which they belong, is hindered by the grasp of monopoly and privilege.

In every assault on those hindrances, in every movement forward in the cause of freedom and equal rights, I know you will be in the van."

A great overflow meeting, which was held in the Mechanics' Institute, was afterwards addressed by Sir Henry Campbell-Bannerman, and he also attended the breakfast on the following morning given by the Chief Liberal Whip and the President of the Federation to the Liberal Secretaries and Agents.

Special General Committee Meeting at Derby on the War

A special meeting of the General Committee was held in Derby on 4th December 1901, to consider the situation in South Africa. The attendance was very large and representative. There was a long discussion upon a resolution, which the Executive Committee put forward, which was moved by Mr Augustine Birrell, K.C., and seconded by Mr (now Sir Edwin) Ann, the President of the Derby Liberal Association, and eventually carried in the following form: "That this General Committee of the National Liberal Federation, whilst recognising the grave differences within the Liberal Party with respect to the earlier stages of the South African War, declares that the time has now arrived when negotiations should be entered upon with the view to the conclusion of an honourable and durable peace, and that for that purpose it is essential that a special Commissioner should be dispatched to South Africa. This Committee views with grave misgiving the suspension of constitutional government, and the extension of martial law to those parts of Cape Colony where the jurisdiction of the Civil Courts could properly have been maintained, and sees in the recent decision of the Judicial Committee of the Privy Council in the Marrais appeal case the most serious menace to the liberties of British subjects, and finally this Committee declares its unabated confidence in Sir Henry

Campbell-Bannerman as the Leader of the Liberal Party in the House of Commons."

Another resolution was also carried to the effect "That this Committee deplores the terrible rate of mortality among the women and children in the concentration camps, a state of affairs which must render more and more difficult the attainment of any permanent peace in South Africa, and urges upon the Government that immediate steps be taken at whatever cost to remedy the present condition of the camps."

When these resolutions were submitted to Sir Henry Campbell-Bannerman, in acknowledging their receipt he said, "I rejoice to find that so completely representative a body has given public expression, by a practically unanimous vote, to views on the South African question so sound and so decided. The action of the Committee was also well-timed, and I believe they have expressed that which will soon be, if it is not already, the prevalent opinion of the country. I would only add that for the kindly reference to myself in the first resolution I am sincerely grateful."

The Annual meeting of the General Committee was held at Leicester on the 15th February 1902, and a larger number of affiliated Liberal Associations were represented there than on any similar occasion, the number of delegates being also the largest on record. At the opening meeting the President took the Chair, and at the request of the Executive Committee called attention to and protested against a development of the custom of canvassing which had sprung up in recent years in connection with the election of the Executive Committee, pointing out that it bid fair, if continued, to impair the usefulness of the Federation. Information had reached the Committee that an offer had been made to pay the expenses of delegates if, in return, they would vote for certain candidates nominated for the Committee, a list of such selected candidates being sent with the offer. The President said that, whilst it might be a

difficult thing to put a stop to canvassing altogether, every delegate present would agree in condemning any offer, no matter from whatever source it proceeded, to pay the expenses of delegates in return for their votes. He earnestly hoped it would be sufficient thus to call attention to the matter, and to give expression to this protest, in order to put a stop once and for all to what threatened to bring discredit on their organization. From the result it would seem that the protest was effectual.

At this meeting a resolution was carried unanimously condemning the policy of insisting upon the unconditional surrender of the Boers, and confirming its conviction that the future contentment and security of South Africa were bound up in obtaining a regular peace on broad and generous lines as the result of a regular settlement.

Emergency Meeting on Education Bill, 1902

On 5th June a special Emergency Meeting of the General Committee was held at the Westminster Town Hall to consider the Government's Education Bill, and matters affecting the general question of Education. The Bill then before Parliament was thoroughly discussed, and the most strenuous opposition to it was earnestly urged upon Liberal Members. The Bill was finally dropped before it reached its Second Reading, and a second Bill was introduced on 2nd July and read a second time on the 9th. Upon the 15th of that month a Manifesto was issued by the Executive Committee of the Federation, counselling renewed resistance to it, and to the Minute of the Board of Education which desired to cripple and injure the work carried on by evening schools and classes. Nothing was done in this Session, but in the following one an Education Act was brought forward and passed by constant closure law in spite of great opposition. It abolished the existing system of School Boards, and transferred Educational work

to County and Borough Councils. The time that has passed since the Bill became law has shown its many serious imperfections. It would be wrong to say that no advantage whatever had accrued from it, or that it was imperfect in every respect, although it was a shameful piece of preference to the Church, as all Tory measures have been; and the abolition of the only bodies which had done systematic educational work for the Nation was a grievous mistake, and one which will have to be rectified. In so far as the Bill broke ground in the direction of secondary education it was purely tentative, and though, thanks to the exertions of the Education Committees throughout the country, much more may be done in this direction than seemed at first at all probable, everyone who has practically to work in the matter agrees that it is far too vast to be dealt with in a single clause of a general educational measure.

During the year which followed the Annual meeting at Bradford, the Liberal Party lost a true and tried friend by the death of Lord Kimberley who had acted as its Leader in the House of Lords. In the resolution of sympathy with his family which was passed on the day after his decease by the Executive Committee, that body placed on record "their profound sense of the loss which the nation no less than the Liberal Party sustained in the death of the Earl of Kimberley, who, for fifty years had maintained the best traditions of English public life, filling great offices in the State,and bringing to the discharge of his duties distinguished ability, a high sense of honour, and an unswerving devotion to principle."

GOVERNMENT AND LIBERTY OF SUBJECT: THE WAR

At the time when the report was drafted which was to be presented at the next Annual meeting of the Federation, which was held in Bristol in May 1902, negotiations were proceeding in South Africa which resulted in Peace, but, in a review of the policy of the year which the Report contains, it is

stated that "Ministers, with a consistency which in other circumstances might be admirable, have continued to blunder both in their policy and in their conduct of the war. They had persistently underrated the Boer power of resistance, forgetful of the fact that there is a whole world of difference between defeat and conquest, and that it might have been expected that the Boers would continue the struggle to the last possible moment, when to the policy of annexation was added the demand for unconditional surrender. The result of these miscalculations, both military and political, had been undoubtedly to prolong the war which, it will be remembered, ended for electioneering purposes, in September 1900. The Federation from the first protested against the policy of unconditional surrender." The report also dealt with the management of the concentration camps in which the Boer women and children, after being removed from their farms, had been compulsorily detained. Miss Hobhouse, who first called attention to the condition of those camps, was subjected to abundant abuse and attack, but she was amply justified in the report of Mr Brodrick's Committee of ladies, and still more in the vigorous measures adopted by Mr Chamberlain when the Colonial Office took over from the War Office the control and management of the camps. The report says, "Whatever may be said as to the difficulty of enforcing sanitary precautions upon those little accustomed to them or to the conditions of camp life, the broad fact remains that thousands of lives, particularly those of children, were lost, which might have been saved had there been better organization sooner instead of later. It is no small satisfaction to know that, just as the policy of farm-burning was abandoned as the result of a Parliamentary discussion initiated by the Opposition, so the action of Liberals, in particular Sir Henry Campbell-Bannerman, undoubtedly led to the steps taken to ameliorate the lot of the Boer women and children." The

Report also says that "No matter probably evoked more indignation than the conduct of certain officers in ordering the inhabitants of a district in Cape Colony to be present at the execution of fellow citizens. Mr John Morley rightly characterised this as 'an infernal atrocity,' and it is satisfactory to know that, after the Government had ordered the practice to be stopped, they discovered that Lord Kitchener had already given instructions to that effect."

In Cape Colony the year had been marked by the abrogation of the Constitution. The Cape Parliament had not met for much more than a year, the longest interval permissible according to law, and therefore the money which was raised by taxation was being illegally spent by Governor's warrant instead of being voted by Parliament. Martial law had been extended to the whole of the Colony, and its actual working and administration led not only to the inconvenience inseparable from a state of warfare, but to injustice and harsh treatment which proved valuable recruiting agents for the Boers, and led to their reinforcement by large numbers of inhabitants of Cape Colony.

At home the fierce attacks upon the right of free speech and of public meeting still went forward. They were apologised for by the Prime Minister, who pleaded for the rioters that the holding of meetings to discuss the war was an intolerable strain on their "human nature," a plea which so strong a Ministerialist as Professor Albert Dicey pointed out meant "nothing less than that legal freedom is at an end, and that, instead of rights secured by the law of the land," we have substituted "the capricious dictates of popular sentiment enforced by the sanction of popular violence." The most serious riot was at Birmingham, and occurred in connection with a meeting called by the Birmingham Liberal Association which was to be addressed by Mr Lloyd George. Organized and concerted rowdyism prevented his being heard, the incitement being largely supplied by a section of the local Unionist Press.

As the Report says, "The result must have exceeded the most sanguine expectations. Not merely was Mr Lloyd George not heard, but the Town Hall was wrecked, a riot took place in which shots were fired, pocket-knives used as missiles, and one innocent person lost his life, whilst the rioters passed a triumphant vote of confidence in Mr Chamberlain, who acknowledged the resolution without having a single word of reprobation for the riot or the rioters. The incident was a grave outrage upon the elementary rights of Englishmen, and, apart altogether from Party considerations, is much to be deplored."

ANNUAL MEETING AT BRISTOL, 1902: EDUCATION BILL

At the twenty-fourth Annual Meeting of the Federation held in Bristol on the 13th, 14th, and 15th May 1902, Dr Spence Watson having resigned the office, Mr Augustine Birrell, K.C., was appointed President with the unanimous approval of the federated Associations. The Education question was the most important matter which was dealt with at the meeting. The resolution upon the subject was brought forward by the Right Honourable Arthur H. D. Acland in a speech of such earnestness, power, and wisdom, that it ought to have ensured, if not the withdrawal of the measure, at least its entire re-modelling. Mr Acland had not attended a meeting of the Federation since that held at Portsmouth in the year 1894. He had been compelled to retire from Parliament owing to serious overstrain in performing his remarkable services for the education of the country when he was in Ministerial Office. His loss was a very serious one, for no one had ever taken a part in the government who had a more thorough and exhaustive knowledge of the important subject of education. His criticism of the Bill was not merely acute and destructive, but there was a strong element of construction running through the whole of it. He showed how as it was drawn it was the negation of Statesmanship and

the abrogation of commonsense. "Whether we require leaders of industry in the future or broader intelligence in the mass of our workpeople, or whether we require both, and they are dependent one upon the other, we ought to give dignity to our new authority. This Bill does not do it. If men are to do their duty to the State, you must give them duties to the State to do. You must enlist in the cause of education every kind of civic activity. This Bill does not do it. It does not give leverage for improvement where improvement is most required; it creates great danger of starvation, even of the better kinds of education which we have got; it aggravates our difficulties; it fosters strife. Our duty was, in the great educational reform which we might have had, to unite together all the best forces of the country—the educational, the religious forces, all the patriotic forces of all lovers of their country wherever you could find them. It was our business to unite those forces for an education which, through its influence on future generations, would enrich and elevate and strengthen our national life. It is because this Bill in my opinion does not carry out these objects that I ask you to support the resolution which is now before you."

But experience, wisdom, and argument, were thrown away, at all events upon the Government and their supporters in the House of Commons, and the objectionable Bill was carried into law. After the experience of its working for three years the minds of perhaps the majority of those who have been engaged with it practically have come round to the view that if primary and secondary education are to be dealt with by one and the same body (the advisability of which is exceedingly doubtful) it should be a body elected *ad hoc*.

The evening meeting at Bristol was held in the Colston Hall, and it was addressed by Mr Herbert Gladstone, who spoke strongly upon the need for Liberal unity. He quoted with great effect the words of the first President of the Federation (Mr

Joseph Chamberlain) at its first Annual Meeting in January 1879: "Before I sit down I would say one word as to the part which we may expect to play in the future. At the present moment I hope we shall be prepared to practise as a Federation that spirit of tolerance and of mutual concession which we recommend to all our individual members. The great need of the Liberal Party at this moment is union. Our first object is to make a unanimous protest against the way in which this country has recently been governed." (Does not this read as though it might well have been spoken in December 1905). "We believe, I suppose, all of us, that the honour and the interests of this country have been recklessly imperilled; we are marched from one surprise to another, we know not what a day may bring forth, and, under these circumstances, our first duty ought to be, and our first object will be, to remove this constant source of apprehension and danger. Everything must give way to that." Mr Gladstone spoke of the disastrous war in South Africa as coming to an end, and trusted that a wise and generous policy on the part of the Government would bring peace, would restore order out of chaos, and would lead eventually to the renewal of friendship and prosperity in South Africa. He quoted from Lord Ellenborough (a Tory Minister in a Tory Government) the words "We desire to see British authority in India rest upon the willing obedience of a contented people. There cannot be contentment where there is a general confiscation. Government cannot long be maintained by any force in a country where the whole of the people are rendered hostile by a sense of wrong, and, if it were possible long to maintain it, it would not be a consummation to be desired."

The question of the war had been dealt with from time to time in the meetings of the Council. Dr Spence Watson stated that "they had seen the whole might of the British Empire engaged in a long, costly, and, in his opinion, useless war, from which we might

ultimately get land and gold, but never glory or honour. We had lost much in many ways through it, at home and abroad. The right of free speech had been denied, open public meeting had been forbidden with the approval, if not the connivance, of the Government, martial law had been proclaimed when the Courts were regularly sitting, and had been allowed to run to such insane lengths that peaceable, law-abiding English citizens, irrespective of sex, had been forbidden to land in English colonies, and free born Englishmen forbidden to leave English colonies for their fatherland. And who cared? The English people went mad with Mafeking, and then gave up thinking about the war. If we cared nothing for our good name being dragged in the dirt by inhuman sentences barbarously carried out, the execution of gallant foes which their friends and relatives were compelled to attend, surely forty thousand men dead or wounded upon our side, and as many on that of our brave opponents, might give us pause. Or, if that was a sentimental view of the case, was it nothing that we should have thrown away two hundred millions of money which might have enriched and blessed the whole Empire, and this, after completely devastating two countries where, by toil and patience, men had made the inhospitable earth habitable by man? Surely never before had so strange an apathy spread over the English people. It was as if they were attacked by a deathly paralysis of the political sense. That was so not only in Foreign but in domestic affairs. Upon the question of the war in South Africa, as in such matters was always the case, the Liberal Party was divided, but the war—and they all hoped that this was true—seemed to be approaching its end. The free British Empire had taken away the independence of two free white peoples, as an old Roman Emperor or a new Russian Tzar might naturally have done. He did not speak of peace. Conquest, captivity, desolation, death, did not go with peace, as he learned

in his early childhood." The fact that negotiations were in progress shortened the speeches as to the war, but an appeal was made to record by an unanimous vote an earnest desire for an early settlement, which might provide a substitute for the present position of affairs, and gradually result in the welding together of the two races, and in bringing about a happier future by just and generous treatment, under which other parts of the world had, in times past, been able to secure that desirable consummation.

Mr Gladstone did not dwell at any length upon the War or its settlement. He began by the great need of unity. He denounced the "immoral and unpatriotic" course adopted by Mr Chamberlain at the time of the General Election. He spoke strongly about the necessity of improved organization. He condemned with great force the bread tax, which he said the country ought to rise against, and he showed how this tax pressed heavily upon the poorest people. He also dealt with the Education Bill, which he declared, if it were passed into law, could have no moral claim on the loyalty of Liberals in the country, and he ended his speech with another appeal for unity. "Unity is our first necessity; unity in aim, unity in organization, unity in action—that alone can succeed; that alone will bring victory to our endeavours."

EDUCATION BILL

On 15th October 1902, a special meeting of the General Committee "to consider the present position of affairs with regard to the Government Education Bill" was held at Westminster, and was addressed by many of the leaders of the Federation as well as by Lord Crewe and the Right Honourable James Bryce. There were 527 representatives in actual attendance and a *verbatim* report of the speeches was afterwards published as a pamphlet by the Liberal Publication Department. It was in vain that the Federation

protested against the passing of this Bill in defiance of the solemn pledges at the General Election; the Tories had the big majority, however obtained; but it is well to put upon record what was felt about it. It was passed by a majority secured on a khaki issue, by the unsparing use of the Closure though obstruction was not so much as even alleged, and by the good offices of the House of Lords. There was indeed a certain point raised in the House of Lords which ought never to be forgotten. It was in fact a disgraceful trick which was engineered by the Bishops in that House. The cost of "wear and tear" repairs, which was by the Bill to be defrayed by the denomination, was transferred to the ratepayers. When the Bill left the House of Commons apparently it was secure against any further financial encroachments, since it is a breach of the privileges of the Commons for the Lords to make amendments imposing charges on ratepayers or taxpayers. The Bishop of Manchester produced some amazing statistics, showing the intolerable strain on voluntary schools, which were additionally impressive because, in the excitement of the moment, he forgot to divide by two, and this made the cost to the Church double the real amount. The Church Party succeeded, against the protests of the Duke of Devonshire, in passing a financial, and therefore an unconstitutional, amendment, by a majority of twenty-six. Then Government connived at touching the privileges of the Commons. The Duke of Norfolk, even after the Bill had been read a third time, proposed an addition to the Bishops' amendment which, while making nonsense of it, paved the way for the final manœuvre to be executed by Mr Balfour in the House of Commons. The amendment was drafted "that all damage due to fair wear and tear in the use of any room in the schoolhouse for the purposes of a public elementary day school shall be made good by the local Education Authority," and the Duke of Norfolk added (with the Duke of

Devonshire's consent), "but this obligation on the local Education Authority shall throw no additional charge on any public funds." When the amendment reached the House of Commons these words from "but this obligation" were actually in italics, and were marked as proposed to be omitted by the House of Commons! It was intended from the first that they should be so omitted, and, thanks to the complaisance of the Government, they were omitted when the amended Bill came again before the Commons, and thus the House of Lords succeeded in interfering in a financial matter. A more shameful trick has certainly never been perpetrated. But the Report of the Federation Executive Committee, which was presented to the next meeting of the Federation which was held at Scarborough distinctly said, "It must, however, be clearly understood that it will be one of the supreme and immediate objects of Liberal policy so to alter the Education law as to secure for the country a truly national system of education, based on effective popular control, and freed altogether from religious tests and sectarian influences."

GENERAL COMMITTEE, BIRMINGHAM, FEBRUARY 1903

The Annual Meeting of the General Committee was held at Birmingham on 27th February 1903, and resolutions were submitted to it on the Education Act, and on the Brussels Sugar Convention, against the ratification of which the Committee protested. It stated that, whilst depriving the United Kingdom of the advantage of cheap sugar, the Convention conferred no substantial benefit upon the West Indies, placed our fiscal arrangements under the control of foreign nations, and constituted a dangerous reversal of the trade policy of the country. There was also a strong resolution passed as to the great increase of expenditure upon armaments which, during the past

seven years of extravagant Tory Government, had gone up from £35,500,000 to £61,000,000 sterling, a total unparalleled even in larger and more populous countries. The following Resolution, which was submitted by the Newcastle-upon-Tyne Liberal and Radical Association, was unanimously carried: "That the adoption in any part of the British Empire of any form of compulsory, forced, or slave labour, applicable to persons untainted by crime under cover of any method or form of special rating or taxation, or however subtly concealed under any name or title or in any manner, upon any pretext whatever, is abhorrent to the spirit and letter of the British Constitution and must be resisted, not only by the Liberal Party, but by every lover of his country, to the uttermost."

I may be pardoned for mentioning here that, after the regular business of the General Committee was concluded, Mr Birrell, the President of the Federation, presented to me a portrait which Sir George Reid had painted and which had been subscribed to by more than 800 persons. The portrait itself I presented to Earl Carrington, who attended and received it on behalf of the National Liberal Club, and, in thus handing it over, I acted in accordance with the generally felt and expressed wish of the subscribers, but a replica of the portrait was presented to Mrs Spence Watson and my family.

I did not need any presentation of the kind to assure me of the kind relations in which I had always stood with the members of the Federation. I must not say more than that, from the first day on which I held office until I retired, and even at all times, whether I was in office or not, I have received from my fellow members of the Committee, from the Officials, and from the members of the Federation, unvarying kindness. It is a humbling but a proud thought that, in carrying out what seemed to me to be called for from me without turning to the right hand or to the left, I believe I may

say that I have obtained the confidence, the respect, and the affection of the members of the Federation generally.

THE LICENSING ACT

The Licensing Act was the solitary contribution of this year of the Government's existence to the cause of Social reform, and a miserable contribution it was. Fortunately the Magistrates generally have exercised their undoubted discretion in the matter of renewing existing licences in spite of a severe and caustic lecture to them by the then Prime Minister, Mr Balfour, in which he expressed a hope that the Quarter Sessions would reverse the decisions already given by the Magistrates at Brewster Sessions.

PEACE

During the year, and shortly after the Bristol meeting of the Federation, the negotiations which had been going forward ended in the Peace of Vereeniging. The chief satisfaction in this matter, to many of us who will always feel humiliated by the fact that our country destroyed two Nationalities, is that peace came as the result of negotiations between the two combatants, and not of unconditional surrender on the part of one to the other. We must not forget that a Cabinet Minister, speaking in this country in the year 1902, declared that the end must be unconditional surrender, and that Lord Roberts had stated explicitly that his terms to the Transvaal Government were unconditional surrender. The carrying out of the terms agreed upon has not been such as to reflect much credit upon us as a Nation. The truth is not yet known as to the extraordinary way in which we have backed out of the written promises of our officers in the matter of requisitions made by them upon the Boers.

ANNUAL MEETING AT SCARBOROUGH, 1903

The meeting at Scarborough was a highly successful one, and the Queen of North-country watering places proved an exceedingly acceptable place to the delegates attending.

Alderman Hart, who had been for seventeen years the much valued Treasurer of the Federation, died in November 1902. We were fortunate in being able to obtain the services of Dr Massie in his place. He at once brought forward the question of a special National Liberal Campaign Fund, and he eloquently appealed to the whole of the members of the Federation and the whole of the members of the Liberal Party to support it.

I need not go through the different resolutions on the chief subjects of the day which were admirably spoken to. A mass meeting was held in the Prince of Wales' Circus attended by upwards of 3000 persons, and it was addressed by Sir Henry Campbell Bannerman, who met with an enthusiastic reception. His speech was worthy of the occasion. He dealt very strongly with the Government position, and especially with the Prime Minister's words to the recent Annual meeting at the Primrose League in the Albert Hall. "We at all events are agreed upon the main lines of our policy, on what it is we want to maintain, and what it is we want to do;" and then he went on to tell the story of the Corn tax, "which had been imposed one year and was to be removed the next by this Ministry of the clear eye, the firm hand and the resolute purpose." He said "The Chancellor of the Exchequer presented us with the very arguments that we employed last year when we resisted the imposition of the tax. 'He said undoubtedly the price of flour has increased to the amount of the tax and a good deal more, and as a good many people make their own bread the cost of the latter must have been increased.' Then, in spite of this, the Prime Minister

argued to the Primrose League in his most philosophic and therefore most convincing manner that this tax neither hurts the consumer nor benefits the farmer. Therefore, he says, it may safely be taken off and with advantage to the people." And all this happened within twelve months.

Then Sir Henry pointed out how the shilling duty was intended by some of its authors to be the forerunner of a great revolution in fiscal policy. It was an era of protection which was to set in. And he stated, in words which ought to be remembered, "Now the generation to which we belong—I am not sure that I don't hover about the past generation myself, but at all events let us say the present generation—has had no experience of the working of a system of protection, has never seen the pinch of poverty, of distress, and the lawlessness and disorder which accompanied it when it existed before. But it is well that we should renew acquaintance with the facts, and I have some words here to quote which I find appearing in the latest number of a most unimpeachable Conservative journal, *The Quarterly Review*. "The era of Protection, as we read the History of those times, is inseparably associated with violent fluctuations in prices, widespread suffering, agrarian outrages and discontent, high rents for landlords, huge profits for farmers, starvation wages and pauperism for the labourers. Its record is the praise of hundreds and the curse of millions." It is well for us to remember that when we hear Protection glibly talked about. But it was something more. This tax was not merely a bread tax or a subvention to the farmer or the miller, it was a signal held out to the whole Empire to send in its claims for preferential treatment."

All through the speech I am struck by the fact that Sir Henry Campbell-Bannerman, in dealing with the different questions which he treats upon —the Irish Question, the Education Question, the Licensing Question, the Law affecting Trade Unions,

Finance—is always abreast of the advanced thought of the time, and he shows how the late Government, and the foolish electors who put them into power, had aroused all the sleeping issues about Religious Equality, Free Trade, Licensing Reform, Peace and Economy. He concludes by saying, "Peace is always in question when a Tory Government is in power. As to economy, if it is in question, it is because they have cast it to the winds and its recovery is almost hopeless. We are unexpectedly forced to fight these rearguard actions against the powers of reaction and on behalf of civil and religious liberty. But out of the bitter comes forth sweet, and our success, which is inevitable, in these rearguard actions, can only serve to give training and fresh inspiration to the progressive forces of our country in the onward march which we are determined to pursue towards the development of the welfare of the people."

The President of the Federation in moving a vote of thanks to Sir Henry Campbell Bannerman mentioned that he was in the House of Commons when that gentleman was first called by the unanimous vote of the Liberal Members to assume the great responsibility of Leader of the Opposition. "Well his time had been troubled; his difficulties had been enormous; the situation he had had to face was crucial and cruel, but Sir Henry was there that night receiving from them all that welcome and love which were due to a brave and honest man."

The Protection Bogey

And now I have to note perhaps the most extraordinary event in domestic politics which any of us have seen. At the very time that the Federation was meeting at Scarborough, Mr Chamberlain made a speech at Birmingham in which he announced his conversion to protection, and stated that, in his view, the issues upon which the Government would take

the opinion of the country would probably not be those which their opponents expected, but would be those which would promote the relations between the Colonies and ourselves which were threatened by other people. He then went on to say that he could not believe that if Mr Cobden and Mr Bright had been present amongst us now, and knew what our situation was, they would have hesitated to make a treaty of preference and reciprocity with our own children. He followed this announcement up with great vigour, forming special associations, addressing large towns in different parts of the country, and exercising himself to the utmost to bring about a change of view in the English people upon the subject of Free Trade. But he had, as has frequently been the case, not studied the matter sufficiently, and not appreciated the real position of the English people. The battle for a short time was an exceedingly sharp one, but nothing has ever been more satisfactory than the way in which the whole country rose against the Protectionist doctrines which were preached. They made no way whatever. Wherever and whenever Mr Chamberlain spoke, great meetings were held immediately afterwards at the same place at which his policy was universally condemned, and it would hardly be wrong to say that it showed itself to be an utter mistake, as a matter of political tactics, to have started a question of the kind. It was sufficiently astonishing to find a man ready to come forward, declaring his sudden conversion and endeavouring to confute the clear and sound propositions which he himself had laid down almost immediately before, and expecting his countrymen to follow him. The National Liberal Federation at once held a great meeting at which Mr Chamberlain's views were entirely condemned, for, on the 1st July 1903, a special emergency meeting of the General Committee was held at Westminster to consider his fiscal proposals. At it three hundred Parliamentary constituencies were represented. Mr

Asquith, who took a great and powerful part in the whole of the strife, and whose replies to Mr Chamberlain were of immense value, moved the first resolution, which was seconded by Mr J. Herbert Tritton of the City of London, supported by Sir W. H. Holland, M.P., and others. It was, "That this General Committee of the National Liberal Federation views with alarm the proposed reversal of our fiscal policy announced by Mr Chamberlain and shortly to be promulgated by him throughout the country, and calls upon all who are interested in our commercial prosperity and the social condition of the people to resist, by all means in their power, proposals which, if adopted, will inevitably raise the price of food and raw materials, and, by increasing the cost of production, reduce trade, involve us in a war of tariffs, endanger our relations with our Colonies, and threaten the stability of the Empire."

A further resolution was also carried: "That in view of the misunderstandings already existing in the Colonies as to the authority of Mr Chamberlain's speeches, and having regard to the dangerous consequences to trade and commerce of continued uncertainty and unrest, it is the duty of the Government to decide and make known at once what their fiscal policy is to be."

But the idea of making things clear was as foreign to Mr Chamberlain as it shortly proved to be to Mr Balfour. Their plan was to hide their real meaning in many words and erroneous statements of what they called facts.

A further special meeting of the General Committee was held in Liverpool on 18th November 1903, and a strong resolution condemning the reversal of our fiscal policy proposed by Mr Balfour and Mr Chamberlain was carried, and this was followed up by a public meeting held in the evening in the Picton Hall which the President of the Federation addressed.

I shall not say more here about the attempt to force Protection upon us, because it was carried on

into the following years, and the Nation has had an opportunity of emphatically expressing its opinion upon that which was not merely a foolish, but I cannot but say even a wicked, attempt to gain popularity by that which would have been fraught with infinite misery to the great majority of the English people, and would have gone far to deprive England of its position as the leading commercial nation of the world.

General Committee, Leeds, February 1904: Chinese Labour

The Annual Meeting of the General Committee was held at Leeds on Friday, 26th February 1904, and protection was again strongly condemned in a resolution moved by Sir James Kitson and seconded by Sir James T. Woodhouse and supported by Lord Brassey. The Licensing Bill was also condemned as a fresh endowment of the Liquor interest. It is interesting to note that thus early our valued Treasurer, Dr John Massie proposed, and Mr Percy Illingworth seconded, "that this General Committee of the National Liberal Federation protests against the Imperial Government giving its assent to any measure permitting the importation of indentured Chinese Labour into the Transvaal." It is of no use the Tory Party crying out against the Liberal opposition to Chinese labour in the Transvaal. The Party has as a whole resolutely set its face against it from the very first.

After the Committee rose there was a public meeting in the evening which was addressed by the President and many others, including the Countess of Aberdeen, Mrs James Bryce, Lord Brassey and Mr W. S. Robson, K.C., M.P. (now the Solicitor General), and a strong resolution was unanimously carried protesting against the Education Act, against the gross mismanagement by the Government of the South African War as revealed by the Report of the War Commission, against the reckless manner in

which the Ministry had increased the ordinary annual expenditure of the Nation, against the threatened action of the Government further to endow the liquor interests, and against the introduction, with the sanction of the Government, of Chinese indentured labour into the Transvaal, and finally, the resolution declared "That this meeting earnestly hopes that the electors will once and for all reject the proposals of Mr Chamberlain and the Prime Minister to re-introduce Protection, and pledges itself to resist by every means in its power the attempt to re-impose taxation upon the food of the people."

At the request of the Ipswich and Suffolk Liberal Associations, a District Conference of representative Liberals from Suffolk, Norfolk, and the neighbouring constituencies, was held at Ipswich on the afternoon of Wednesday, 16th December, and Mr Birrell occupied the Chair. There was a numerous and thoroughly representative attendance, including the Liberal Members of Parliament and prospective Liberal candidates for the constituencies in the different counties, and a strong resolution was carried against the reversal of our fiscal policy proposal by Mr Balfour and Mr Chamberlain. The Government record was reviewed and indignantly condemned. A meeting was held in the evening at which Mr Asquith was the principal speaker, and he greatly added by his speech to the debt of gratitude which the Liberal Party owes to him.

Executive Committee

In October 1903 the Executive Committee issued a Manifesto upon the political situation in which it dealt with various matters, but chiefly with the fiscal question. It showed what an extraordinary position this had already assumed ; how the Prime Minister would give no definite expression upon it, and how Mr Chamberlain had left him in order to more effectually preach a crusade against our National system of

finance. It pointed out how Mr Chamberlain's son had been made Chancellor of the Exchequer, so that he was still immediately represented in the Cabinet; and it called upon the sober minded men of every shade of politics to appreciate the absolute necessity of defeating Mr Chamberlain at the polls. The whole structure of his case for a reversal of our National finance was unsound from top to bottom. Mr Chamberlain's figures were never to be relied upon, and illustrated nothing so clearly as the recklessness of his nature and the crudity of his latest opinions.

It then mentioned what the Federation had done through the Liberal Publication Department to supply to the constituencies literature bearing on the real aspects of the case, and it stated that Mr Chamberlain was generally reported to expect one electoral defeat and then to be rewarded by a great victory. "Let it be our recognized business to help to make his first defeat so decisive as for ever to banish the hope of ultimate success from the mind of the most rabid Protectionist."

The Manifesto then went on to speak of the Report of the South African War Commission, and it stated "that a country which could allow such a report as that which the Commission had just made to pass over its head as a matter of small account must have lost not only its self-respect as a nation esteeming itself a military power but also all the instinct of self-government. It is no mere War Office affair. The worst blunders were not those of the War Office. The real head and front of the offending was the ignorance, indifference and ineptitude of the Cabinet itself, which seemed to think nothing of the dread possibilities of war. 'A conscientious man,' wrote Burke in his letter to the Sheriffs of Bristol, 'would be cautious how he dealt in blood. He would feel some apprehension at being called to a tremendous account for engaging in so deep a play without any knowledge of the game,' and the writer goes on to rejoice on behalf of his

friends and himself, and that 'no man's life pays the forfeit of our rashness. No desolate widow weeps tears of blood over our ignorance.' These are consolations denied to the Cabinet of the War."

How greatly these words have been intensified by the recent disclosures before a further Commission. The Tory Government would in former days have been justly tried for treason to the State. The manifesto went on to deal with the various questions before the country, especially with Finance, the effect of the Sugar Convention of 1903 and the Education Act.

I have mentioned that Mr Austen Chamberlain had become Chancellor of the Exchequer. Mr Balfour, in his juggling with the question of Protection, had at length gone too far, and it became clear that Free Trade was no longer his policy, and the Duke of Devonshire, Mr Ritchie, and Lord George Hamilton tendered their resignations. Mr Balfour had Mr Chamberlain's resignation in his pocket and revealed it to the Duke of Devonshire, thus keeping him in the Cabinet for another fortnight. But this trick failed so soon as Mr Balfour had himself to speak on the platform, and by mid-October Mr Balfour found himself without his Free Trade colleagues, to whose names must be added those of Lord Balfour of Burleigh and the Honourable Arthur Elliot.

The effect of Mr Chamberlain's autumn campaign was peculiar. He had two organizations which he had formed *ad hoc*, the Imperial Tariff Committee covering the Birmingham District, and the Tariff Reform League which was to hustle the rest of the country into Protection, but they were of little advantage. It became perhaps a little ludicrous to see a number of gentlemen meet to decide what tariff would suit their own pockets, and the people were not slow to see the real meaning of it. There was a debate upon an Amendment to the Address, and Mr Akers Douglas, speaking as Leader of the House, stated that the Government was not in favour of Protection and did not intend to advocate it; and

that the Government policy did not include either the taxation of food or the question of Colonial preference. Early in March Mr Pirie put down a motion condemning the fiscal policy of the Government. Mr Wharton, with the consent of the Prime Minister and the Government officials, put down an amendment asking the House to approve the explicit declarations of his Majesty's Ministers that their policy of fiscal reform did not include either a general system of Protection or preference based on the taxation of food. But this at once led to a revolt of the Chamberlainites. They met to the number of 110, and resolved not to support the amendment, the withdrawal of which they demanded as the price of their support of the Government. The price was rapidly paid and the weak Government remained in office. In the incisive words of Mr Winston Churchill, "When Mr Balfour had the power to combat Protection, he had not the will; now that he has the will, he has no longer the power."

SOUTH AFRICAN WAR COMMISSION

I have alluded to the Commission on the conduct of the War. This had never been popular with the Government. Lord Salisbury, in the House of Lords early in 1901, said frankly, "that the Government had never been in favour of inquiry," that it was not "desirable to know who was to blame," he would "rather leave that buried in obscurity." The Report clearly showed that from his point of view he was right. It showed also that the criticisms which had been made upon the war, and for which freedom of speech and freedom of the Press were abolished for the time in England, were absolutely justified. It was evident that the calculations of Mr Chamberlain and his colleagues had been that the Boers would not fight. As he himself said to Sir Henry Campbell-Bannerman, "it was a game of bluff." Sir William Butler, who had most clearly seen the real

nature of the conflict, and had given warning as to what it would really mean, was recalled for his audacity in speaking the truth. The war began and was simply a gamble with the safety of the Empire, risking its existence and involving us in a deplorable loss of life and treasure. The *Standard* expressed no more than the bare truth when it declared that, "our lack of preparation and the faults of our system were mainly responsible for the colossal expenditure, the deplorable delay, and the heavy sacrifice."

Little Stupid Wars

But the Government had not been satisfied with the Transvaal war, and, both in the previous year and in this year, we were pursuing an enemy in Somaliland at enormous expense, and for objects which it would pass the wit of man to discover. We had called our enemy the "Mad Mullah." We ignored the fact that he was sufficiently sane to out-general the men we sent against him; that his Government was one of the best of the African Governments; and that from his subjects we got the only men who were really fit to stoke our steamers through the intense heat of the Red Sea. We went on fighting him year after year, and at last we gave the matter up; and indeed we went further than this, we absolutely concluded a treaty with him by means of Italy, and he became our ally.

In this year also we began an extraordinary and absolutely unintelligible war with Tibet. We did not call it a war, we called it a "mission." We marched through that inhospitable country, fighting its people at great advantage seeing that they were armed in a very inferior way, and when we got to a certain point we came away again without any result whatever having been attained. The history of our little wars is about as degrading and as foolish as anything which can possibly be conceived.

It must not be forgotten that, in this year also, the mine owners on the Rand were given power to import Chinese for the purpose of increasing their dividends. The conditions under which they were to be imported, if not those of actual slavery, were at all events inconsistent with freedom, and the Rand Magnates themselves told us the real reason why, since there was a shortage of black labour, they preferred yellow labour to white. Their fear was that, "if a large number of white men are employed on the Rand the same troubles will arise as are now prevalent in the Australian Colonies, *i.e.*, that the combination of the labouring classes will become so strong as to be able to more or less dictate, not only on questions of wages, but also on political questions by the power of their votes when a representative Government is established."

And thus we see that this invertebrate Government was heaping up all manner of difficulties for any Liberal Government which might be elected to replace it. It even seemed as though the accumulation of bad measures and of un-English methods adopted which must be dealt with was so great that it would be impossible, if a change were made at the time of a General Election, to find a Government which would be able to do more than clear up the messes of its predecessors. How poor a vision the Tory Party and Tory ministers had!

The End Approaches

Now my story draws to a close. Everything was pointing to the General Election, which Mr Balfour and his friends were so anxious to avoid, but which must come before many months passed. On 1st March 1905, the General Committee met at Crewe. The Fiscal question was still the dominating question, but, by this time, the nostrums of Mr Chamberlain and Mr Balfour, with which they had sought to

beguile the country into a return to protection, had been explained and exposed.

Amongst the resolutions passed at Crewe was one which declared it essential to the welfare of the country that the next Parliament should resolutely apply itself to the retrenchment of the National expenditure, a settlement of the Education and Licensing questions, and a bold policy of social and electoral reform, and the Prime Minister was called upon to dissolve Parliament and permit the country to pronounce on the Protectionist policy and the general record of the Tory Government.

Sir William Harcourt

In the preceding year Sir William Harcourt had announced his intention of not again standing as a Parliamentary representative, and in October 1904 came his sudden and unexpected death. The Executive Committee at once placed on record its profound regret at losing one who, for so many years, had been a trusted Leader of the Liberal Party, unfailingly loyal to the cause alike in its prosperity and in its adversity, and always ready to devote to its advancement his brilliant abilities both in counsel and in conflict. A noble and commanding figure in Parliamentary life, he always upheld the best traditions of the House of Commons, and was nobly tenacious of its honour and dignity. The Committee tendered its sincerest condolences to Sir William Harcourt's family, and earnestly trusted that the evidence of universal respect evoked for him whom they had lost would in some degree tend to lighten the burden of their sorrow.

We indeed lost a good friend when we lost Sir William Harcourt. He was not only a power in the House of Commons, he was a real power throughout the country. There was always something impressive in the highest degree in the way in which he took strong and clear views, and directed the

minds of the Party into safe paths. Although for the past six years he had ceased to lead the Liberals in the House of Commons, his heart was still truly with us, and we always had the advantage of his counsel and of his brilliant advocacy. To many of us his death was a personal loss in a very real sense.

ANNUAL MEETING, MANCHESTER, 1904

The Annual meeting of the Council was held in Manchester in May 1904. It was the largest meeting which had ever been held since 1891 when the Federation met at Newcastle-upon-Tyne, and there is little doubt that the President was correct when he attributed this to the approach of the General Election. He said, "During the last ten or twelve years we have gone, and are invited to go steadily back—back to Protection, back to Church rates, back to servile labour in our Colonies. Gentlemen, we cannot, we must not, and we will not afford to do that. We are asked to look forward, we and our children, to a future in which no true Liberal could breathe, a future of Imperialism, of Cæsarism, of Empire, of expansion abroad in places where no white man can live, of military conscription at home, of false ideals of national greatness and of national honour. This false Imperialism is a new kind of religion of a most bastard order, vulgar in its conception, dangerous in its growth, destructive of the love of liberty, scornful of the just claims of other races, indifferent to bloodshed. It is fatal to real manhood, and to virtue, and can only end in financial ruin, political corruption, decay and death. It is against these false conceptions of England's duty and of England's destiny that we shall fight at the next General Election."

Perhaps of the many questions which were before the country and which were discussed by the meeting that which was the freshest concerned the Nat onal

expenditure. Mr L. V. Harcourt, M.P., moved the following resolution upon this subject:—

"That this Council views with alarm the enormous growth of the ordinary yearly expenditure of the nation due to the long predominance of the Tory Party, and declares such expenditure to be uncalled for by national necessities. In particular the Council protests against the extravagance of the amounts now spent upon armaments, and against the loss of life and waste of money involved in needless and aggressive expeditions, such as those in Somaliland and Tibet."

It was the first time that Mr Harcourt had ever addressed the Federation, and his speech was detailed and of great importance. He went into the enormous increase of expenditure under the Tory Administration, pointing out where there could be safe reductions; he dealt with the question of Navy and Army expenditure, and, as to the Army, he pointed out that it could, and ought, to be reduced by a general recognition of the fact that we cannot be, and do not wish to be, anything in the nature of a Continental military power, "What we require is to be able to put on board ship an expeditionary force of moderate size, which can go to the boundaries of our possessions where the wheels of Empire may be creaking in the ruts of expansion. We do not intend, we do not wish, we are not fit, to conduct a European land war of aggression. We want a small force for home defence; how small a one is necessary few people realise, if only you treat your volunteers well and do not discourage them as the War Office seems always inclined to do."

I must also note that Mr Charles Fenwick, M.P., moved: "That this Council protests against the Ordinance permitting the introduction of indentured Chinese labour into the Transvaal, and, whilst challenging the statement that cheap foreign labour is a commercial necessity, places on record its conviction that the proposal is inconsistent with the common

law of England, destructive of the love of liberty, inimical to the true interests of South Africa, and likely to weaken the bond of union between the several portions of the Empire."

The evening mass meeting was held in the Free Trade Hall, and was addressed by the Right Honourable John Morley, M.P., who has always been ready to assist the Federation in critical times. He said, "We have met at what I do not hesitate to describe as one of the most remarkable and interesting moments in our political, our party, and our national history. What do we see? We see the break-up of a great Party, that has had rule over this country, with an interval too inconsiderable to be worth recalling, for the best part of twenty years." He then pointed out, upon the Fiscal question, how Mr Balfour in addressing the Primrose League could not or dare not tell them what his fiscal policy was. He spoke about the delay in appealing to the country and added, "the longer they postpone their day of doom the worse will their doom be." He briefly touched upon the Education unsettlement, and denominational or secular teaching, noting the difficulties which the Tory policy had evoked and aggravated, and the effect of which had been to land us in an amount of social friction not often surpassed since the Reform Bill. He mentioned the Licensing Bill, upon which Mr (now Sir Thomas) Whittaker had spoken that day, and added, "if he will allow me to say so in his presence, Mr Whittaker is a man who more closely argues questions and is more accurate in his statement of facts, so far as we have been able to test him, almost than anybody who has ever undertaken the advocacy of temperance reform." Then he addressed himself to Chinese labour. "The Colonial Secretary said that the Chinese labour question is now dead. Is it? And I was very astonished to see that the Prime Minister said, in his famous speech in which the part of Hamlet was left out (the Fiscal question), that we were men who reck-

lessly made colonial interests the sport of party. That's very hard language. Are we who now protest against Chinese labour the only people to protest? Why, twelve months ago everybody protested, and when the Cape Colony Assembly passed a resolution against it, when the Australian Assembly passed a resolution against it, were they moved by a spirit of faction? No; they know what Chinese labour is; and they know it so much that I read to-day in your excellent *Manchester Guardian* that at this moment in Australia, or some portions of Australia, the phrase which some of us are not entirely unacquainted with of 'pro-Boer' is now taken by the hostile phrase of 'pro-Chow.' I think a Minister must have got to his last cartridge when he taxes us with being indifferent to colonial interests. Such talk is no better than clap-trap. I will tell you what in my view is at the root of this great feeling, the great tide which ran against Chinese labour, and which I believe is still running and will run. There are two things—first of all disgust at the thing itself, and second, disgust and indignation at the exposure which this resort to Chinese labour makes of all the pleas and pretexts that were used for the war." As to the war itself he quoted a passage from the *Economist* newspaper "which is certainly not a pro-Boer newspaper or even a Radical newspaper. What do they say? 'We looked for prosperity and we find ruin. We looked for a new colony which was to be the home of British settlers, and we find a little band of mine-owners bent upon making unprofitable mines pay enough to enable them to get out of them. Why should the utterance of these predictions, which the event has completely falsified, give Lord Milner a title to dictate to the English people?'"

Finally he turned to the forces against Liberalism, and to the chances of a good victory at the General Election, and he repudiated the idea of rejecting a Unionist Free Trader because he has given some

votes or made some speeches which were not entirely to the Liberal mind. "All depends on our getting everybody in to defeat those men who, as I think, and I am sure most of you think, have with good intentions enough (though they deny us good intentions), betrayed and are betraying the best interests of the country." Finally, he gave a warm welcome to Mr Winston Churchill, who was present on the platform, and he ended, "The last word I would say is this, that you must look at these political questions seriously and earnestly. No questions except those, shall I say, of religion, are more worthy of your serious and anxious attention. Forget in your best moments the mere cavils of Party, and remember that we are all—Labour men, politicians, all of us—we are citizens, common citizens, of a grand country; we are the heirs of a noble tradition; we believe that human progress can only be won by human effort, and that effort, I hope, all of us in our different degrees, ages, and situations, will pursue with determination, with unselfishness, and with a resolute directness and simplicity, that must in the end win a crowning victory."

Mr Morley was followed by Mr Winston Churchill, who made a bright and powerful speech, a foretaste of the succession of great speeches which he has since made as Under-Secretary for the Colonies. It was little wonder that so valuable a convert, and Liberal candidate for a Manchester division, was received with intense enthusiasm.

THE COMING ELECTION

The work of preparation for the coming election went on rapidly. Continuous care had been expended upon the preliminaries for it for more than a year. The Publication Department was indeed admirably prepared. The Campaign Fund had been largely subscribed to and amounted to £39,000. The

Fiscal question seemed to a great extent to have given out, and indeed its position was rather an anxious one because there was a tendency for Liberals to be convinced that it was no longer a serious danger. The Government was going from bad to worse. Its desire to cling to office in spite of divisions amongst its friends and the derision of its enemies was ludicrously great. It was blind to the signs of the times. It could not understand that a Nemesis waits upon the Government which carries on a costly and an unjust war; that it may be able to avail itself of the fever which spreads amongst the people when the war is yet young and the result uncertain, but that so soon as the time comes when the bill has to be paid, when the people at home have learned by sad experience what the loss of the most important members of the family means to them, and, especially, if they see that the war has been carried on for the benefit of a few, and that the old traditions of freedom have been trampled upon in the name of Imperialism, they will inevitably resent the conduct of those who misled them. Ministers could not understand that they were no longer omnipotent, and that the nation no more trembled at their draggled plumes. Mr Balfour's conduct of business became worse and worse; it ceased entirely to have any seriousness, and it became rather an endeavour to play with words than to deal with facts; verbal adroitness took the place of real argument, and his Party seemed not quite dissatisfied with the fact. Above everything he endeavoured to avoid giving any clear expression of his views upon the fiscal question; he made it impossible to say certainly whether he was in favour of Protection or the reverse. He endeavoured to prevent the question being discussed in the House of Commons; he ran away from awkward divisions, he even allowed a vote of censure upon himself and his own special policy of Retaliation to be inscribed on the journals of the House as having been passed *nemine contradicente*.

The sight of that House being degraded by its Leader, who should be the trustee of its honour and usefulness, was indeed pitiable. Mr Balfour, in his despair of getting some popular subject upon which he could go to the country, absolutely held out the promise of a Redistribution Bill. It is needless to say that this matter never came to the front.

The Government did succeed in carrying an Aliens Bill, and, by so doing and postponing the period of putting it into operation, they created a great difficulty for their successors. It is impossible to believe that this Bill is not to a great extent directed against the traditional and sacred right of refuge for the politically and religiously oppressed of all other peoples. It is a disgrace to any Government to have passed so cowardly a measure into law.

The Irish Question had assumed a fresh aspect with the appointment by Mr Wyndham of Sir Antony Macdonnell, an Irishman, a Nationalist and a Roman Catholic, as Under-Secretary, in order to carry out certain specific objects including the co-ordination of Irish Government. This occasioned a great commotion amongst the Tory ranks, and Mr Balfour surrendered to the so-called Loyalist faction and sacrificed Mr Wyndham to their attacks, protesting that he himself was as much opposed to Home Rule as ever. But there had been the admission that a Unionist Prime Minister and a Unionist Irish Secretary recognised that it was essential that something should be done, and that Ireland should be governed by Irishmen in accordance with Irish ideas.

ANNUAL MEETING AT NEWCASTLE, 1905

The Annual meeting of the Federation held at Newcastle on the 18th and 19th May perhaps lost something from the feeling which existed that the great battle was close at hand. As Mr Birrell in his admirable address said: "We meet once again in this

famous Northern city full of memories for us,—some proud, some sweet, a few bitter, but all full either of inspiration or instruction. We meet in full fighting array but still in the cold shades of Opposition. . . . The situation is a trying one because, for two years past, we have been living the full lives of eager politicians on the eve of a General Election, with our organizations fully equipped for every detail of the contest, but Mr Balfour still remains behind the barricades of the Septennial Act, mocking our pomp and grinning at by-elections. . . . Mr Balfour's dialectical skill, his astute policy in wearing down Mr Chamberlain's, excites the admiration of his Whips and the envy of his more dull-witted colleagues, but in the country, where plain men still live, his dodges and devices, his runnings away from the House he is supposed to lead, his secret dealings with his rival, on whose half-contemptuous friendship he has still to rely, excite nothing but feelings of mingled amazement, indignation, and contempt. The rehabilitation of the present Government is, I believe, impossible. We know that our avenger liveth in the shape of the elector at the polls, and we are also well persuaded that the longer Mr Balfour puts off his appeal to the country the better prepared we shall be for the fight and the more crushing will be the defeat he will eventually sustain."

And this spirit is shown throughout the various discussions. Perhaps the most important one at the moment was that which Mr Charles Fenwick, M.P., moved: "That this Council is strongly of opinion that immediate steps should be taken to restore to workmen the right of effective combination of which they have recently been deprived by decisions of the Courts. This Council is also of opinion that the State should create permanent machinery applicable to the whole country for investigating and alleviating the lack of employment caused from time to time by exceptional trade depression." Mr W. H. Lever seconded this,

saying "that it would be a disaster to the country if workmen had no right to effective combination. Effective organisation of labour would give the public the cheapest and best quality of goods, would give the workman the security to which he was entitled, and gave the employer certainty in the conduct of his business, which he otherwise would not have."

Licensing Reform was spoken to by the Right Honourable R. B. Haldane, K.C., M.P., in a very powerful speech, and Mr T. P. Whittaker, M.P. (now Sir Thomas) seconded the resolution which he moved. Sir Christopher Furness, M.P., and Mr Reginald McKenna, M.P., dealt with the question of Free Trade. Mr John Massie and Mr Francis D. Acland took Education.

But it is not necessary to go into these different matters in detail, as will shortly appear.

Sir Henry Campbell-Bannerman addressed the mass meeting in the Palace Theatre on the evening of the 19th, at which 5000 persons were present. His speech was a bright and powerful one. He dealt with the Government's reluctance to go to the country, which he said we could well understand on three grounds at least. "There is their record which will not bear a moment's inspection; there are their ranks, which are deeply divided and demoralised; they have no definite policy except a few strings of phrases which can hardly be put seriously before the world."

Sir Henry ended his speech, in which he had dealt with Mr Chamberlain's fallacies upon the matter of Free Trade, by pointing out to those who were workmen and to others that "the way to improve our trade is first by lightening the burden of taxation through a peaceful and frugal policy; secondly, by better education and more drastic control of the liquor traffic; thirdly, by improving the character and stamina of our people by reform of the deplorable surroundings in which masses of them live; and,

lastly, by giving agriculture a chance, by giving the farmers security, and offering the labourer a career in his calling. It is in such directions as these that will be found the redemption of our social system, and not by restricting trade and by following the will-o'-the-wisp of baseless fallacies and mischievous and illusive promises."

Now I come to the General Election, which had been well prepared for. Every seat, almost without exception, had a Liberal Candidate. Mr Balfour put the trial off nearly to the last moment, and then resigned under the impression that a Liberal Government would be difficult to form, and that it would go to the country at a disadvantage. But Sir Henry Campbell-Bannerman was equal to the occasion. He instantly formed one of the strongest and most capable Governments which the oldest of us has seen. Mr Balfour's final trick not only failed, but recoiled severely on himself. The new Prime Minister advised the King to dissolve Parliament on the 8th January of this year and the result of the Election was truly amazing. There has never been anything like it in the history of English politics. It seemed as though the electors were determined once and for all to show to the Tory Leaders their real opinion of the way in which the business of the country had been mismanaged for more than ten years. With the exception of the small group of constituencies directly influenced by Mr Chamberlain, there was practically a clean sweep made of the Conservative Party. Thirteen Members of the Tory Government lost their seats, amongst them being the Prime Minister himself, and we were confronted by the extraordinary fact that, when the elections were all over, it proved that 401 Liberals, 29 Labour Representation Committee Representatives, 83 Irish Nationalist Representatives, and only 157 Tories had been elected. There was a silly attempt made to show that Chinese labour had been improperly brought into the controversy and lay at the

bottom of this extraordinary *débâcle*, but that has passed. It is clear from the Addresses of the different candidates, and from that which has happened since, that love of Free Trade, freedom of Education from religious tests and from priestly control, dread of the deadly power of the liquor traffic, annoyance at the enormous and unnecessary expenditure, and a hatred of war, lay at the bottom of the vast movement.

Sir Henry Campbell-Bannerman was Prime Minister without dispute. He has filled the place in a manner which is beyond all praise. He has been a tower of strength. The first part of his first Session is now over, and in the respect and affection of his Ministers, and the admiration and affection of the entire Liberal Party, we can see what a great place he has won for himself. It has been gained by courage, patience, determination, and self-effacement. He has associated with himself in the Ministry men of great experience, as well as those who have not before been tried as members of a Government. It is too soon to speak certainly of what has been achieved, but much evil worked by the Tories has been remedied already, and in every direction life has taken the place of death.

More has already been accomplished than would satisfy a Tory Government for several Sessions. Thirteen Bills only await the Royal Assent, and thirty-six others are more or less advanced; some having passed the Commons and gone to the Lords.

There is movement everywhere; there is a spirit of reform in the House of Commons such as has never been known before; the idle trifling and badinage of the Tory Prime Minister have been exchanged for the calm eloquent seriousness of the Liberal Prime Minister. In every department some great change is going forward. The questions which have been hanging fire for long years are now fairly at the front, and many of them are advanced to a stage in which

they have passed the House of Commons. That House is instinct with the passion for reform. Old shibboleths are thrown upon one side. As, at the General Election, the people showed their power and swept away incompetent rulers and evil administration, so their representatives now show their determination to have solid and abiding work done. There is up to now a wise retention. It is understood that all matters cannot hastily be dealt with all at once, but all conventional hindrances have to give a very serious account of themselves or be swept out of the way. There is hope in every direction.

It is quite true that the House of Lords has to be reckoned with. That House is making claims of its right to deal with measures which come up from the House of Commons, which shows that they consider themselves not simple agents for the Tory Party, but entitled to set at defiance the clearly expressed will of the Nation. It is the hope of some of us that the final fight with the House of Lords is nearly at hand. If it really begins we have no fear as to the issue, and the Peers will no doubt have noted that the result of the By-elections which have taken place since the General Election has been such as to show that the mind of the country is still made up on the great questions already put forward, and on those which will shortly be at the front, and that it is determined that work shall be done. In the Liberal Party I would include all who are anxious for the progress of their country. That there are divisions amongst the host of progressives is absolutely certain, and those divisions may possibly interfere with the present full realisation of the hopes which are entertained, but never in the lifetime of any amongst us has the Party stood so well as at the present time. It has a Leader whom it is proud to follow; his Government is one of the greatest promise; and the National Liberal Federation is happy in entering on a period of constructive policy with a man at its head in the Right Honourable Arthur Dyke Acland who

has already proved, as Minister of Education, of unique value to his country.

I cannot conclude without saying how great a satisfaction it has been to us who are of the rank and file of the Party to find our valued ex-President at the head of the Board of Education. It has proved a post of great difficulty but of high honour, and he has dealt with the thorny matters which have come before him with consummate ability. Of our excellent Executive Committee, which consists of twenty-three persons, including the President, Chairman of Committee, and Treasurer, no fewer than twelve stood at the General Election for seats in Parliament and all were elected; and, finally, since the General Election our Secretary, whose labours have been incessant and enormous, and who has invariably shown rare tact and ability, has received the honour of Knighthood. This is not merely an honour to him but to the admirable body of Agents whose loyalty to Liberal principles at times of great difficulty has been beyond all praise, and who have recently elected him Chairman of their Agents' Society.

From time to time in this history of the Federation I have had to speak of the important work done by the Liberal Publication Department. Up to the Election the Right Hon. Augustine Birrell was Chairman of that Department and Mr Charles Geake was the invaluable Secretary. Too little is known of Mr Geake. His services to the Liberal Party cannot be put in words, but it is worthy of record that, during the Election the Publication Department absolutely disposed of no fewer than 26,140,000 leaflets, booklets, pamphlets, and the like, and in addition to that they sold of coloured posters 700,000. The enormous mass of literature which was demanded and disposed of weighed no less than 118 tons. It is quite impossible properly to estimate the extraordinary service that this Department rendered during the critical time.

I must apologise for the many shortcomings which

will be manifest to those who care to consult this book. It has been produced with some difficulty, and has had to be written at intervals of health occurring irregularly through three years. This must be my excuse for passages which may have crept in and which refer to very different dates. But I think that it is not an improper task to have been undertaken by one who has been associated with the Federation from the first. Now that I have no more the power to take an active part, I feel the great value to the Party which the Federation has been and is, and most earnestly do I hope that, in the time to come it will continue to do work which may be better than that which has already been done in the time that has gone, though it can never be characterised by more earnestness and devotion to the cause.

A LIST OF THE ANNUAL MEETINGS OF THE NATIONAL LIBERAL FEDERATION.

No.	Place.	Date.	Elected President.
Inaugural.	Birmingham	31st May 1877	Joseph Chamberlain, M.P.
1	Leeds	22nd January 1879	Do.
2	Darlington	3rd February 1880	Do.
3	Birmingham	26-27 January 1881	Jesse Collings, M.P.
4	Liverpool	25th October 1881	H. Fell Pease, M.P.
5	Ashton-under-Lyne	19th December 1882	Do.
6	Bristol	26th November 1883	James Kitson, Junior.
7	Stoke-on-Trent	7th October 1884	Do.
8	Bradford	1st October 1885	Do.
9	Leeds	3rd November 1886	Sir James Kitson, Bart.
10	Nottingham	18-19 October 1887	Do.
11	Birmingham	6-7 November 1888	Do.
12	Manchester	3-4 December 1889	Do.
13	Sheffield	20-21 November 1890	Dr R. Spence Watson.
14	Newcastle-on-Tyne	1-2 October 1891	Do.
15	Liverpool	19-20 January 1893	Do.
16	Portsmouth	12-13-14 February 1894	Do.
17	Cardiff	16-17-18-19 January 1895	Do.
18	Huddersfield	26-27 March 1896	Do.
19	Norwich	17-18 March 1897	Do.
20	Leicester	22-23 March 1898	Do.
21	Hull	7-8 March 1899	Do.
22	Nottingham	27-28 March 1900	Do.
23	Bradford	14-15 May, 1901	Do.
24	Bristol	13-14 May 1902	Augustine Birrell, K.C.
25	Scarborough	14-15 May 1903	Do.
26	Manchester	12-13 May 1904	Do.
27	Newcastle-on-Tyne	18-19 May 1905	Do.
28	Liverpool	23-24 May 1906	The Right Hon. A. H. D. Acland.

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